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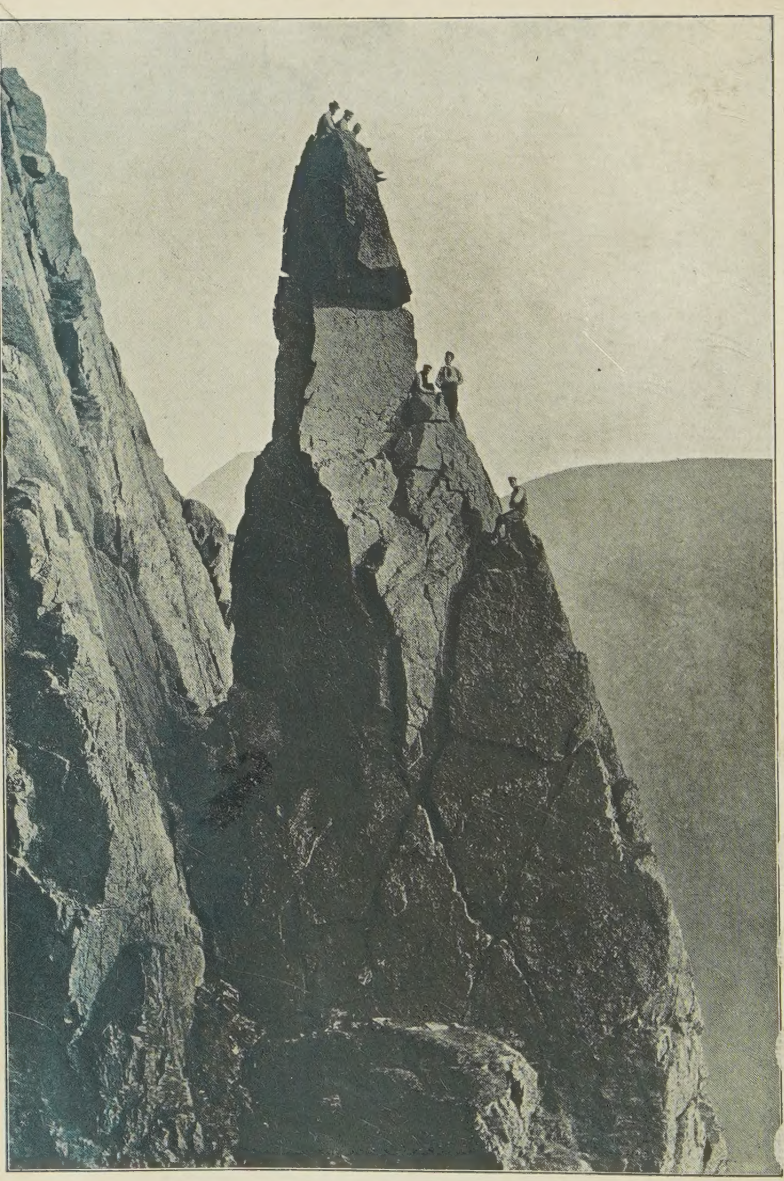

THE NAPES NEEDLE. [p. 47

LAKE-COUNTRY RAMBLES

BY

WILLIAM T. PALMER

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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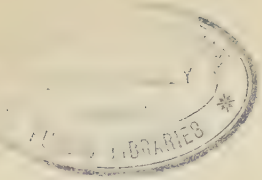


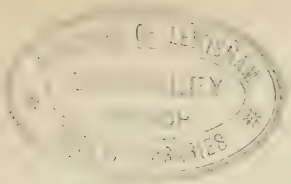
NOTE

I HAVE in the following chapters endeavoured to paint a series of word-pictures of the Lake-Country. The scenes are diverse, every phase of fell life out of doors in which I have found the picturesque having been laid under contribution. It is the narrative of one who, in a dozen years of wandering, has been brought into close contact with shepherds, poachers, anglers, and dalesmen of various degrees. If a preponderance of attention appears to be given to sport, it is because recollections of this side of life are easier and more vividly retained than are those of ordinary work-days.

After the first three chapters (two of which are almost personal), the arrangement is according to the sequence from spring to spring in which the various scenes may be encountered.

It is with great pleasure that I embrace my first public opportunity of thanking for varied kind-

nesses the editors of the *Golden Penny*, *Land and Water*, *Country Sport*, the *St. James's Gazette*, *To-Day*, *Country Life*, the *Spectator*, the *Field*, and *Macmillan's Magazine*, in whose journals most of this work had its first appearance.



LAKE-COUNTRY RAMBLES

CHAPTER I

AS A FELL-WALKER

The term 'mountaineering,' like many others in our language of sport, has been so loosely and widely applied that its meaning is now almost impossible to arrive at; therefore I feel that fell-walking is the only title by which can be expressed the ascent of such heights as are to be found in the most elevated portion of England—the 'Lake District' of Westmorland, Cumberland, and Furness. Fell-walking is not a new pursuit to me, for I have passed all my life within measurable distance of the fells—indeed, from many parts of the home-dale can be seen glorious series of lofty peaks. The low moor, bounding the north of the valley, is, indeed, the terminal offshoot of the Harter Fell range—a group almost unknown to guide-book and tourist. Years ago I made my

first ascent of this hillside. I was not more than five years old at the time. Our destination was a tarn among the heather-covered hills, and I well remember the task—how toilsome the ascent of the steep, grassy lane to the breezy open moor, how welcome the distant gleam of water! What a wearying trudge it was over the rolling moor, where here and there the encouraging glint was lost to view, before we stood by the tarn-side and peered from the boat-house steps into clear peaty depths, where verdant waterweed gently swayed to an otherwise imperceptible flow! To tell all the delights of that summer afternoon would weary my readers; in fact, it is only mentioned as one of two incidents which decided my interest in the fells. The other was the loan of a guide-book, from the maps in which I got a splendid idea of the work before me, as it was my intention to thoroughly explore the Lake-Country.

My first walk of any magnitude was to Mardale (Haweswater), a distance, going out by Longsleddale and the Gatescarth Pass, and returning by Nan Bield Pass and Kentmere, of about thirty-three miles from Boustone. This initial effort across loose, stony mountain tracks, and across wholly unfamiliar country, with only general directions for a guide, did not prepossess me very

strongly; yet every holiday not spoiled by rain since that has been passed among the glens and fells of Lakeland. During these expeditions I have ascended nearly all the mountains available by day and by night, and, of course, all this practice has been developing my physique, besides giving me a tolerable insight into the ways and means of fellscraft. As much of this learning as can be expressed by my pen it is intended to give for the benefit of readers, with some description of actual climbs under all circumstances.

In the fell district mentioned, the more prominent peaks are Scafell Pike (3,216 feet)—the highest point in England—Scafell, Bowfell, Great End, and Great Gable, all of which can be reached with comparative ease from Wastdale, Borrowdale, or Great Langdale; Mellbreak and Red Pike, with kindred giants, near Buttermere; Skiddaw and Blencathra (or Saddleback), not very distant from Keswick; and the massive Helvellyn group, consisting of Helvellyn, Seat Sandal, and Fairfield, which may be approached from Patterdale, Ambleside, Grasmere, or Wythburn. A good many lower but interesting ridges jut out from these parent ranges. The Kentmere fells are an outlying group, containing some good climbs and picturesque scenery, but they are far out of the regular tourist line. However, the cyclist, by

turning west from the great Scotch road near Shap village, will, by proceeding across the moor to Haweswater, find his way easily into the lap of these craggy giants at Mardale. Besides those enumerated, other districts present fair climbing; between High Street and the foot of Ullswater there are many hills worthy of ascent, while in the great wilderness round the heads of Duddondale and Eskdale there is plenty of hard and interesting but lonely work. After all, it must be confessed that, in point of difficulty and excitement, fell-walking is hardly comparable with crag-climbing, yet, by adopting free and easy routes, sufficient difficulty and danger may be met with.

It is impossible to recommend equipment to suit all; some find their kit adequate with one-third the quantity of others. A knapsack, or rucksac, containing a clean shirt and a fresh pair of stockings, is the only luggage carried by many expert climbers; they trust to luck for what further things are required, yet their luck (or resource) is wonderful. However, their method may be most useful to themselves. Other fell-walkers take a considerable number of articles, which swell their burdens so that whole days have to be set aside for shifting headquarters and nothing more. The willing human of this type is at times a painfully frequent sight in Rossett

Ghyll. He struggles up the rough pass under his self-imposed task, a perspiring, tired individual long ere he reaches the shores of Angle Tarn, and faces the long grass slope of Eskhause. His day's tour is to Wastdalehead, and those miles are regular backachers to him. In my opinion, this system is too much a pandering to luxury. Better leave your lodgings and take a good ramble round before homing to the nearest hostelry, for it must be steadily borne in mind that the fell-walker's Lake-Country is a comparatively small area.

The fell-walker surely needs no tackle; he travels in his ordinary clothes, plus a pair of fairly stout boots—the favourites of the natives are of the 'navvy' pattern, three-quarter inch soles studded with rows of heavy nails, thick toe-plates and heel caulkers. The tops are fairly high, and of thick, strong leather. Yet often in wandering among the roughest and most difficult ground I have met men in thin cycling shoes, who seemed to be enjoying their outing! Most climbers carry stout fell-poles (a term introduced by Mr. Haskett Smith) as equipment, but this article is totally unnecessary, except for descending ticklish portions of scree, where a fall would be dangerous, and as a moral support when passing along a crumbling cliff-edge. In winter, of course, things are much different, and the stick is very useful.

If you *do* use it, be particularly careful in its manipulation when descending. If you are going with the pole in front of you, a very slight overbalance is sufficient to cause a trip, and you are pretty sure to have a nasty fall. More than one life has been sacrificed among our fells to this error. A broad-brimmed hat is far from a disadvantage, especially if your eyes are apt to become bloodshot and tired from exposure to wind and bright light. You often cross wide expanses of quietly sloping moor, with the sun blazing full in your face. And the sun! The late James Payn, most genial of climbers, used to argue most positively that the heat in Lakeland was more intense than in any other corner of England. He based this testimony chiefly on an ascent of Black Sail Pass with a scorching July sun behind him. Under the circumstances, his statement was hardly remarkable.

A pocket-compass is often useful to a fell-walker, though it is remarkable how few people understand its use. All, indeed, there is to do is to take the exact bearing of the summit-cairn before the base is left. When this is not done, you are apt to stray; for a summit seems to change its relative direction when you are moving toward it. In misty weather a compass is all but indispensable, particularly if the route be ill-marked.

A good sharp walk every day should keep the muscles and body in sufficiently good condition to meet any likely fatigue in a fell-walking tour. Of course, the unusual nature of the ground will tire the novice. Fell-ground may be divided into grass, scree, stones, and crag—and each has its own methods of surmounting. On grass in dry weather an ordinary step is used to carry the walker along, and it is little more exhausting than on the road. After rain, however, fell grass is very slippery, and careful footing is repaid by the greater ease and speed of progress.

The banks of débris to be found on steep fell-sides or under long ranges of crags are best known as scree or shirling ; the last from their perpetual sliding down when an ascent is attempted. As screes vary in size from that of a speck of coarse sand to cobbles as large as tea-kettles, there are several different methods of climbing them. Among the larger fragments considerable care is required in balancing for the next step forward. Among the minutiæ, which are to be found at the head of the fan-shaped scree-beds, the easiest posture for advance is as for steep ascents—body poised well forward, stooping, in fact, arms swinging loosely, the toes at each step being driven well home into the yielding mass. This will be found, it may be,

a somewhat trying position, but steady, persistent energy, if properly directed, pays best. If a foothold is missed, or by any reason becomes insecure, it is not good policy to try and recover this hold. Trust to the other foot, which, by the whole weight of the body being pressed upon it, is less likely to give way. A little practice will prove that this instruction must be conscientiously followed; for the novice, in slipping out, both bruises himself and wastes energy which should be conserved for higher ground.

Wherever 'stones' are mentioned in this chapter, it must be taken to mean those loose fragments which, from the size mentioned for the largest scree, are strewn over such wide expanses on our fells. Lichen-covered, weathered slabs about the summits, rugged boulders in the dale-heads, tributes from the long line of crags—if they are not numerous, the path will be observed to avoid them. Otherwise its course lies straight over the largest fragments, and progress has to be made by leaping from rock to rock. It has been found that this is really easier than crossing the 'stone' belt by a path which attempts to be an 'easy' way. The greatest danger met in fell-walking is among stones. When trying to cross a long stretch of these, say between Eskhause and Scafell Pike,

or round the head of Rydale, the walker is apt to become careless, and this lapse may be pulled short by a mishap. The writer injured his knee when going at speed across the stones in Ewer Gap (Bowfell) on a misty morning, and speaks from sad experience.

The tall cliffs on the sides of various mountains, though so enticing to the cragsman, are no affair of the fell-walker's, though those shattered rock-faces, miscalled 'crags,' are often resorted to by strong climbers as variants to the usual routes. There is one point in particular where this can be the case—the Rossett Ghyll foot route to Bowfell Top. After toiling up Grass Tongue, the rocks are reached by a turn to the left. The angle is steep, but the rock much broken, and some safe hand-over-hand climbing is met with. In winter this is a particularly laborious route.

When you arrive at the long-desired summit, perspiring freely from your exertion, there is nothing more natural than to stand awhile, or wander aimlessly about, admiring the wide view. This is a most unwise proceeding, as the air on the hill-top, from constant circulation, is invariably many degrees colder than in the valleys. The most dreaded and immediate result of carelessness of this kind is colic, and those

who have temporarily suffered from this will most appreciate my warning.

An acquaintance with the tracks across the passes is essential, but their system is easily mastered. Cairns of various sizes mark the more important, but others are less easily followed. Whether anyone has passed that way recently may be found by a careful survey of the outcroppings; for, though the walker may not yet have noticed it, every time the foot is placed on a protruding slab or loose piece of shale, the hobnails in the boot leave their marks distinctly. These white scratches are to be looked for and followed. A good many paths are to be found in the ghylls; but these are usually rough and difficult, owing to their following the course of the water. But the trouble experienced in crossing crag-beds or in tracing out a route through the gullies is easy in comparison with the following out of a trail across a wide grass moor, when a high wind is blowing and a dense mist surrounds. Sheep-tracks cross your way in every direction, and many of these are hard to distinguish from the man-track, which must be followed. However, though very distinctly marked, they are usually very narrow; not more than six inches wide, frequently less. The edges of sheep-paths, moreover, rise straight up; a man's track usually fines down gradually.

There are many ways, indeed, by which the difference is detected, but they are beyond my power to describe. It is the old story of experience counting for much. An expert fell-walker will instantly differentiate between the two on the grounds of level and direction alone.

In a walk along a cliff edge it will be noticed that above the precipitous parts there are many outcrops of stone, entirely absent on the less abrupt ghyll-heads. It is, therefore, hardly to be wondered at that accidents, even in the most inclement weather, are most rare. Besides, there are danger signs in the grass, in the wind, in sounds, and in almost everything, which can guide the wary walker.

The feeling of being *properly* lost in a mist cannot be described by anyone who has not experienced it. The danger from exposure, too, is most serious. But sometimes a walk through the clouds is not too uncomfortable for enjoyment. Some time ago I spent four or five hours climbing in a dense mist. I had come from Buttermere over Black Sail Pass, where I first encountered the clouds, to Wastdalehead, and was making for Windermere by way of Eskhause, the second highest English mountain pass. To reach this I had to climb to the summit of the Styehead Pass, and then cut across the bogs to another route for the Hause. The mist rolled deep over the tops

before I left Wastdale, and every ghyll and turn in the mountain breasts surrounding the valley was closely invested. In the Styehead travelling was more tolerable than on the slippery grass of the valley ; a strong, cold breeze hissed over the scree below, and whistled in an eerie fashion among the crags of Great Gable above. Higher up the damp clouds closed around till only a few yards of the path could be seen at a time. The air was very chilly ; but the track, save where it cut across the bogs at the passhead, was well marked by cairns, and the whole route therefore safe and interesting. As I sat a minute by the shore of Sprinkling Tarn, my memory hastened back to tales of exposure and death, of rescue and narrow escapes, among the white-draped fells, but the environment was enough to encourage such thoughts. The dark, rippling surface was only apparent for a dozen yards before it merged into the shifting mass of gray. A huge presence loomed in front, it might be a big boulder ; but instinct, sharpened by experience, told that it was only the distorted outlines of a sheep. A rattle of falling water among the mist-hidden cliffs, a gurgle from the outlet of the tarn, the hoarse gloat of a raven from the rocky heights of Great End, and the shuffling movements of a few sheep feeding among the boulders — these were the

only sounds. The gale was very strong on the summit of Eskhause, and progress was made with difficulty. Near Angle Tarn I stopped to note the effect of the sunlight on the whirling masses from which I was rapidly descending. For a moment a whisk of mist surrounded me, then melted away, leaving a fine view of uninhabited valley and rugged mountain-side.

It must not be taken, however, that I do not recognise the grave possibilities which are open to any stranger who loses his way among the mist-covered fells. There is no gainsaying the fact that extreme vigilance is necessary when a tour has to be made into the mist, and bearings should be carefully taken wherever possible. The path should be followed strictly, for it is impossible for any man to walk accurately in a mist. Personally, I have lost my path in cloud-banks many a time, and inevitably will do so again ; but there is no immediate danger in *this* to anyone at all acquainted with the fells.

One of the chief charms of fell-walking is that it may be indulged at all hours and all seasons. But if there are two periods at which the sport is at its best, they are when the cool, clear days of spring allow ascents with the least possible fatigue, or when the moonlight reigns over the fells, and the silence and massiveness become almost overpowering.

Sometimes, if the winter has held its sway tenaciously and long, you climb into the cloud-cap, and find yourself in a whirling snowstorm. In the valleys the day has been dull, with perhaps a little rain. I remember particularly one such. It was early June, and everything by the roadside bore the fresh, lively look of early summer. We had driven in to Coniston through almost continuous rain. The Old Man was still deep in his nightcap, but we hoped to climb him, as usually he is not a difficult subject. Accordingly, we threaded up the path by the quarries—the nasty sharp slate-dust so much in evidence here in summer had welded into mud, making the ascent less laborious. Before long we reached the lower edge of the mist, and here we stopped for a final survey. Indistinctly below us was a greeny-blue well of water, Coniston Lake, but the film of falling rain blotted out all beyond save bare outlines of woods and hills. We did not see Low-water, the white veil of mist was too dense; but it was ultimately located by noting the echoes. As we got higher and on to the exposed shoulder of the fell, the wind became more powerful, and the descending particles gradually changed from rain to snow. Patches of half-molten white began to be seen on our path, and our party crossed several drifts before the cairn was sighted. Though the

hour was barely two, it was half dark up here. The snow fluttered down from a leaden cloud above, around, and below, or was hurled at us in the seethe of the gale through the fog-banks. Sometimes the wind came in such powerful gusts that it was difficult to stand erect. Around the maën was a wide field of snow; the face of the caërn was thickly coated with white, the air was bitter cold, and our exposed position almost untenable. After a short interval we were glad to descend. One section of our party speedily detached itself, and disappeared into the shifting gray. We soon reached the region of fern and bracken, boulder and scree, and emerged into clear air. There had been, we were informed, a good deal of rain while we were on the mountain, but our statement as to snow was hardly credited until the gale blew the clouds aside and showed for an hour the white, silent fells.

My favourite climb is during the summer dusks —they cannot be called nights—when, starting from some customary centre, the path to a famous summit is struggled up. In the gray, cold dawn the final slope is topped, and from the cairn the day is watched rise in the east. Down the hill to a good breakfast; you have combated the dreary silence and the hardest of fell-walking, and should be ready and willing for a long day's rest.

In winter fell-walking is more difficult; the cold becomes more and more intense as you rise through the intakes, now crowded with sheep; the snow masks all save the most abrupt crags; for miles every landmark is buried. Such small indicators as do rise above the snow-fields are distorted by the white mantle with which the gale has plastered them. A tramp in a January blizzard across an open moor or pass is a feat of strength and perseverance. The danger of inadvertently straying from the proper track is much greater than at any other time, while the fact that the most obtrusive warnings (*i.e.*, the outcrops near the cliffs, as mentioned previously) are obliterated makes progress rather more than risky. But after the storm comes a calm, perhaps on a moonlit night; danger is minimized by the brightness, though the thick snow makes progress arduous.

Millions of stars gleamed and twinkled above as we started from Buttermere for a walk to Scale Force, after which we hoped to climb some way up Mellbreak. Yesterday, as evening drew on, and the air became more frosty, a few snowflakes had floated in the breeze; this morning three inches of snow masked dale and fell, ghyll and crag. All day the storm continued, to cease at nightfall. We crunched along where we judged the path lay, but were always tripping and slipping

among hidden boulders. After forty minutes' hard labour we reached Scale Beck, by the side of which was the route to Force Ghyll. The wind had swept a band of heather and bracken almost clear of snow, and up this we crashed. When sufficiently elevated, we found the gorge difficult to get into, for the bank to be descended was precipitous and crumbling. At last we discovered a slack which was feasible, and down it dropped into the pitch-dark ghyll. Above, sheer black cliffs, with brilliant moonlight playing upon the wavy mountain-ash trees at their tops; from these the stream fell, a gleam of creamy white, till lost in the blackness around. Only an intimate acquaintance with the 'lay' of the rocks and much careful climbing permitted us to come close to the icicled basin, into which the water tumbled from above. This is a cool position on the hottest summer day, but now the flying drops of spray seemed to be particles of ice, so quickly did they freeze. The cold is a memory—ugh! Looking down the gully, a deep, narrow vista of Crummock could be seen, its brightened surface contrasting strongly with the bleak slopes beyond. After a careful scramble, the moor was again reached, and we made toward Mellbreak, a huge shoulder of which, capped in dead-silver frost-cloud, confronted us across the glen. The ascent

was fatiguing, but at last accomplished. About five hundred feet above the valley we climbed into the mist-cap, and after a shivering twenty minutes cleared it. From the narrow apex of the fell what a view there was—bright blue gleaming with myriad lights above, chill white, feathery mist-piles and solid white mountains in grand distinction below. But the fact that we had now been tramping about for some five hours, and that we were standing in a bitterly cold breeze, a long way from our warm beds, made a stronger appeal to our senses than this vision of beauty, so we commenced the descent at once. Carefully selecting the long grass slopes, we made splendid progress, sliding, falling, and rolling, as the snow-crust gave us footing or disappointed us of it. We reached the foot of the fell about halfway down Crummock Water, and after a few minutes found that the easiest headway would be made by trusting to the ice-surface. The lake was not completely bearable, though the thermometer had by this hour (1 a.m.) touched zero. We escaped a good deal of rough walking by venturing across a corner of the lake, leaving the ice finally near the landing-station for the Scale Force boats.

Under circumstances such as those just sketched large parties of climbers are undesirable, as the capacity of individuals varies so largely, and quite

a good proportion will be comparatively weak walkers. Ladies, too, unless inured to similar work, are better left behind. I remember quite well an instance when a large party left Grasmere for an ascent of Helvellyn in its snow-garb. Progress had been slowly made nearly to the hause at Tongue Ghyll, when one lady fell down exhausted. Stimulants were applied, and she returned to Grasmere under escort. Such an incident, however, did not deter the other members of the party from reaching Grisedale Tarn at about noon. From this point the real ascent begins.

Soon after surmounting Dollywaggon Pike, the walkers met a piercing wind, blowing straight into their faces, across long stretches of snow. Heated with their toilsome ascent—the drift below the summit being extremely difficult, owing to its partial overhanging—the party was in the worst possible condition to resist the attacks of cramp, and, sure enough, two of their number were attacked. Freely applied stimulants allayed the awful pain, but the victims were still unable to move toward either the summit or the valley. A trench in the drift had accordingly to be dug to shield them and their guard from the biting wind, after which help was requisitioned from the nearest hamlet. It was quite dark when the 'rescue'

was finished, and the two sufferers were placed in a warm place.

Even among expert climbers, the clutches of frost and snow are not without serious benumbing effect, and quite recently a party of such found themselves in a very precarious position among the crags on the Pillar Rock, in Ennerdale. They had descended by a rope into one of the fastnesses, and then were unable to negotiate the steep, snow-covered ascent to safety. They were missed as evening drew on, and, after a long search, a rescue-party located them. After a long struggle, the men were drawn up in safety, and reached the top of the mountain none the worse for their adventure. My reason for mentioning this is to give a warning to such as may stray into Lakeland in winter to go warily among the loose crags, which give the most entertainment and excitement, as there are occasions when advance or retreat are equally impossible, and this may happen even among the screes and steep slopes so familiar to the fell-walker.

CHAPTER II

NIGHT-CLIMBING

I FEEL that this subject, though referred to in the previous pages, deserves a special chapter to itself. I have made many climbs under cover of darkness, and think my exertions amply repaid.

The sun sets, Nature prepares for the coming night, people come scurrying from every fellside, anxious to reach the valleys ere complete darkness sets in. The cool, softly circulating air refreshes after the heat of the day. Why not in this ideal time go climbing the mountains from which such retreat is being made ?

The best regulated mountain path has a happy knack of disappearing every now and then, as it cuts across a bog or dives into a gully. In daylight these places can be followed easily. The boot-scratches on the stone, or the sighting of the next turn of the track, together with the landmarks, are indications not available in the darkness. Lanterns are not often used to find the

way at night, and many a box of matches have I seen wasted in peering over a forty yards width of grass to see if anyone had previously passed that way. When once you lose the track at a corner in the dark, it is best to just drive towards the corner of the skylight you wish to reach—by-and-by you may come across a fair path. To an expert difficulties seldom occur; he can tell by the texture of the ground when he is on a track.

However, sometimes a seasoned climber goes wrong, as witness the following extract from the diary of a night-climber of great experience. He speaks of a walk up Mickleden, a sub-valley of Great Langdale, from which a route passes up Rossett Ghyll to Scafell Pike: 'Got off the track about eight times in two miles, and at last got hopelessly lost. Determined, however, to make the best of it, I sat under a big rock and unpacked some biscuits. The rain, which had been falling for the last half-hour, now descended in torrents. Just in front was a stream, and across it I could just distinguish a dark object, but had no idea what it was. I then got out my map and compass, from which it seemed that I must be very near the well-known sheep-fold, where the paths for Rossett Ghyll and Stake Pass divide. However, as I was tired of searching, I

decided to wait the approach of dawn. In about half an hour I could see the whole valley—and the sheep-fold within a few yards, being the dark object at which I had been looking for the last hour.'

Night-climbing in cloudy weather is almost dangerous. The clammy 'mist-breath' is on your face as you get into the fell; the most familiar landmarks, the hill-tops, which on a clear, still night can guide you safely, are hidden in the mist. The path is followed as closely as possible, speed is reduced, halting is made criminal; but even then the increasing light often finds you wondering if you are not asleep, for there before you is the gateway you passed through seven hours before. You have scrambled over rough places innumerable, and thought that you were going straight ahead, but your path has been in a wide circle. How such a state of things comes about is not for me to discuss, but the fact remains. If you are curious to understand more clearly, climb back into the mist. There is a rime-like hoar on the ground, and, if you can find the line, your footprints during the whole walk are clearly seen.

More than once the writer has walked for hours in a mist without getting any further forward, but an adventure which befell three

friends of his is most worthy of note. They intended to cross a fell between two valleys on a rainy morning. As they reached the common, a great bank of clouds enveloped them. They kept on as straight as possible, hoping in half an hour to reach the further descent. After about an hour's rambling they came on the footprints of three persons in the grass. 'So ho! there is someone in front of us;' and they followed the trail as hard as they could.

Another hour passed, and they reached a point where were *six* sets of footmarks. 'That caps owt,' said one. Just at this moment a breath of wind whipped up the mist, and 30 yards away was the gate to the intakes, and beyond the dale they had left two hours before. The sky becoming clear, they followed the still apparent tracks, and found they had twice passed within a hundred yards of the point at which they should have entered the other valley.

One of the delights of night-climbing is the haphazard manner in which it is possible to take your meals. About midnight you feel 'a vacancy within,' which makes a halt desirable. The amount of resource shown in this detail is an infallible guide to a man's experience in the sport. Some luxurious parties load themselves with bottles of hot cocoa, wrapped round with much flannel to

keep in the heat, and it is grand luck to meet a hospitable party of this sort when the icy morning breeze penetrates everywhere. A cup of cocoa prepared over a spirit-lamp is very welcome, though the cold waiting for it is tiresome.

My first night-climb was to Hillbell, one of the Kentmere giants. The chief remembrance is of a steely, starlit sky bridging the narrow, quiet valley. We were all novices in fellscraft, and plunged through scree and fern in direct line for the summit. Our final approach was by a narrow chimney, the hardest climb I ever encountered on that class of ground. Around the cairn were lying relics—barrel hoops, etc.—of the Jubilee (1887) bonfire, and blackened stones marked the exact spot of the beacon. The sunrise was lovely. Just as the light flowed down on Windermere, a boat began to move on the water, and every dip of the oars was signalled by a flash of sunlit water. When the sun was well up we made a move for home. What a horrible place we had come up—a precipice from the valley which we would not descend !

To Kentmere High Street is a splendid midnight trip from Kendal or Staveley. On the fringe of the mountainous country, commanding an unbroken view to the east over the Eden valley far into Cumberland, with the irregular masses of Coniston Old Man, Scafells, Langdales,

Helvellyn, Fairfield, and Saddleback grouped on the north-west, with a westward glimpse of the sea and the Isle of Man, and southward over the Fylde—the climb by Kentmere comparatively easy—its popularity is easily explained. The track when it first turns into the fell opposite Nathrigg is difficult to keep, and some parts of Nan Bield Pass are rough and rocky. I have climbed this mountain a good many times now, and have experienced all sorts of weather upon it, but only once have I encountered my ideal sunrise. Bright starlight ushered us into the fell, and soon we were 500 feet above Kentmere reservoir, crossing the boulder-strewn slope for Nan Bield. The perfect stillness was broken fitly by Nature's self—the rolling of the mountain becks into the still, calm tarn below. As we climbed higher the reservoir looked as dark and dismal as the rude crags which sprang into mid-air beside it, while through the pass Small Water reflected the softening moonlight which rendered visible many an unknown ravine and rocky precipice. Now we passed into the jaws of the pass along a rugged little path, scarcely discernible, winding among broken fragments of rock and crossing beds of feathery parsley fern.

After passing the cairn we dropped a few turns down the pass to avoid some unnecessary scree.

It was now 1.45, the air was bitterly cold; in the horizon beyond Haweswater was rising an arch of lighter blue—the herald of the day. We walked smartly along the tops and reached a point where we paused a moment to admire

> 'The precipice abrupt
> Projecting horror on the blackened flood.'

There, deep below, was Blea Water, with cats-paws of morning wind chasing over its brooding surface. A few minutes' walk brought us to the summit.

To the west we gazed upon a most exquisite moonlight view; to the misty horizon was a succession of light-blue hills scored with deeper-coloured valleys, while the river lake of Windermere stretched, a well of green, apparently to infinity among the mists. In the east was visible the dawning day, and we watched its glare develop with almost breathless joy and admiration. Then from the depths rose the mists of morning—a fleecy upheaval, a sea out of which protruded, as so many islands, the higher hills. A puff of wind changed the smooth surface into a turmoil of frozen waves, which, as the sun gained power, rolled themselves into masses and were dissipated, displaying the valleys in all their freshness and loveliness.

On another occasion we climbed Helvellyn.

We reached Grasmere in the soft twilight, but before we had got far up Tongue Ghyll black clouds collected on Fairfield to the right and Seat Sandal to the left. Beneath the fringe in the inequalities of the ridges light peeped through in singular patches. The basin-like valley was in itself a picture of gloom ; the rugged brows of the hills looked more fearful than ever. The path is moderately rough in daytime, but in the dark it was awful, and we soon lost it, and had to plunge upward through the soaking grass and moss. As the gully narrowed, we crossed the bed of the stream and reached a fair path over the pass. Soon we passed Grisedale Tarn—a silent sheet of water under the screes of Fairfield—and climbed towards Helvellyn. Gradually the smoky wreaths collected, and finally shut out the tarn below. An hour later we were standing on the pike of Helvellyn. With every shred of clothing damped through, every hair on our heads a thread for moisture, we still did not envy the stay-a-beds that morning. Three miles from the nearest house, 3.20 a.m., and nothing but a supernatural visitation would make that inn-keeper give us breakfast before 7.30. We quickly dropped below the clouds and dawdled down to Wythburn. After breakfast the mists rolled away and a splendid day ensued.

Another climb was over Bowfell and Scafell Pike, but this was not merely to witness sunrise ; it was an early start for a long day on the fells. Once past the farmhouse of Wall End (we had started at 1 a.m. from Elterwater), we lost the path and scrambled up the rocky Band. For awhile we were below the mist, but when we got into its uncertain light every crag in front seemed to be the summit ; and what scores of false hopes we had ! Ultimately we came to the highest ground, and here we found the cairn. Leaving this, we fell foul of some crags, which my friends prepared to descend. However, I objected, for the way to Eskhause must be on higher rather than lower ground. A few minutes' argument followed, and then the mist was whirled up to show Angle Tarn 900 feet below us. We were standing on the very edge of the precipice. We retreated, and made another cast to Eskhause, which, however, brought us to another cliff overhanging the torrent Esk. How cold and bright were those tiny cascades, the sounds of which, each clear and distinct, came up to us ! Back into the mist again, and then we found the route to Eskhause. By now the sun must have risen, for the grimy gray clouds gradually allowed some light to filter through. When we returned from Scafell Pike we reached the borders of the mist.

Not often are disappointments welcome, but when the fells are piled with rain-clouds it is at least a relief to turn aside and wend your way to some secluded mountain tarn or quiet riverside retreat, there to await the day. As it nears, the pearl-gray mists are delicately lit up, the grim, mysterious valley shadows deepen for awhile, each gleam of colour in the sky, each shadow on the rocky slope, the finest detail of scree and isle, is vividly portrayed in the clear, calm water. The whole effect is glorious, almost terrifying, and compares easily with sunrise from the highest hills.

CHAPTER III

CRAG-CLIMBING

The most fascinating of English outdoor sports is crag-climbing. Nothing can compare with it in its calls on nerve and energy, in its splendid triumphs and defeats, and in its glorious fireside recollections. And, moreover, our own country holds the best district in the world for its indulgence. As the famous climber, Mr. Mummery, said: 'Climbing in the Caucasus is safe and easy; in the Alps it is often difficult, but generally safe; but rock-climbing, as practised at Wastdalehead, is at once difficult and dangerous.' Coming from such high authority, and bearing on what are essential points in any pastime, the words cannot be lightly esteemed.

The climbs about to be mentioned are in the famous South-west Cumberland district, on the mountains of Scafell, Great Gable, and the Pillar, and reference will be made to ascents in Great End and Scafell Pike. It may be neces-

sary here to remark that these are descriptions of actual climbs, and not a general survey of the whole crag-climbing district. It is our intention to call attention only to that portion of crag-climbing possible to men who have neither time nor opportunity to specially study the subject.

Of course, it is not in everyone to become a great cragsman — only men of exceptional physique and practice can rise to the higher branches of the art. A slight defect of nerve or muscle is apt to come out at dangerous situations under the tremendous strains common to the sport, and a person whose confidence in himself, after repeated trials, is weak should never attempt really difficult climbs.

A little more preparation is desirable for a crag-climbing holiday than for an ordinary tour. As regards boots, these should be the heavily-nailed variety usually offered for mountaineering. It is a good plan to purchase them some months before going climbing, and, after wearing them a few times to 'break them in,' to put them aside till required for earnest work. The more indestructible your touring suit the better; for very often clothes come in for exceptionally rough usage—say, when rounding nasty corners where your whole weight is scrubbing them against the

uneven cliff. As regards the rope, this is an indispensable adjunct to crag-climbing, and the worst of all to manage. There are plenty of good ropes, passed by the different Alpine and crag-climbing societies, to be had, and on one of these you must pin your faith. They have been tested, both wet and dry, by men who know exactly what is required, and who will not pass any inferior goods.

As regards yourself, your success and the ease with which it is obtained will depend to a large extent on condition. The usual training for hard walking holds good ; but the use of the dumb-bells is required to add strength and endurance to the arm-muscles, on which so much often depends. This exercise also benefits the hips and spine, on which some heavy work may devolve. But if a man is deficient in nerve it is impossible for him to become a cragsman.

The intending climber should obtain quarters at Wastdalehead Seathwaite, or elsewhere in Borrowdale, or in the Langdales. The accommodation is often limited, as more than crag-climbers rush into the district at the holiday season, and it is assumed that our friend is unable to get from business at any other time. The following incident is typical and true: 'On arrival at our quarters, after an all-night climb,

we were informed that on the previous evening two young men had called inquiring for accommodation, and had expressed their willingness to share the same room, *if it were absolutely necessary*. On being informed that every bed in the house had three occupants, and each table about four, they strolled on to try elsewhere.'

To reach the crags a long, hard walk is inevitable, and carrying the rope is found to be exhausting work. Arrived at the scene of operations—and be sure you are there before you make any preparation (on the Pillar, for instance, there is a short face of steep rock up which many an enthusiast has rushed, thinking to reach the summit quickly, but once on the top of 'Pisgah' he sees the 'Promised Land,' far across the impassable Jordan Gap)—carefully compare the rock-face in view with the tracing you have taken of the illustration in your Climbers' Guide. Pick out the route you have previously decided on, then carry out the climb if you can. It will be found a good plan to copy on a card the instructions the expert has given; they are then easily referred to, and the effort of writing fixes them more clearly in your memory. In climbing, attention should be closely given to the white scratches on your path—the impressions of the hobs of your predecessors—

for these indicate the most popular and easy route. Climb slowly, and if in company be sure the men behind you are able to follow. At the head of every pitch a halt should be made, if there is sufficient room for all to come together, and the feasibility of the next step decided upon. Never forget the precariousness of your position. You are clinging, maybe, half-way up a cliff, a hundred yards of rock above, the same below. A slip here means a fatality, and there is no chance of recovery. In such a position there is little fear of anyone being careless; but after the worst of the exertion is over many men do not exercise sufficient vigilance, and the most terrible of climbing disasters are traceable to a lack of care in such positions.

We will first describe some of the easier climbs on the Scafell group, taking afterwards the more difficult and exciting pieces of work on Scafell, Great Gable, and the Pillar. Wastdalehead, the crag-climbing metropolis, at the very foot of the Scafell range, provides the nearest resting-place. Seathwaite and Langdale are about three hours' walk from the summit of Scafell Pike. The mountain group is the highest in England, and is covered with crags of all degrees of difficulty. The most popular ascents are Broad Stand and the Mickledore Chimney, on the Scafell side

of the Mickledore Chasm, from which their ascent is commenced ; Piers Ghyll, a majestic gully in the north-west shoulder of Scafell Pike ; and Cust's Gully, a scree shoot on Great End.

One of the safest climbs on which a tyro may try himself is the Broad Stand, which opens a few yards over the crest of the Mickledore Ridge, on the Eskdale side. The route is at first a narrow slit behind a square rock, through which it is necessary to pass sideways to reach a patch of grass. Above this is a slippery eight-foot wall of rock, and this has to be negotiated—not a pleasant task when a considerable volume of water is trickling down—after which a broad band of grass leads to the summit of Scafell. In misty weather this climb is more difficult.

'In descending the last bit, I let the others down with a rope, and then followed myself. One of the party, seeing me cautiously rounding the last and most awkward corner, promptly seized me by the coat and hauled me to a place of safety. At this, one of the others remarked that had I slipped both of us would have gone to the bottom. "No, no," said my rescuer, "not both. If he had slipped I should have let him go." '

For first practice with the rope, however, Broad Stand is splendid, and more than one good

climber has here received his first lesson in the craft. A rope is often very difficult to manage. At the first nasty corner you find that either your companion or yourself has got to the wrong side of the rope, or, when walking across steep slopes and scree, you are perpetually tripping over it; however, with practice, these difficulties disappear.

A more difficult alternative to the Broad Stand route from Mickledore Chasm to Scafell top is by the Mickledore Chimney. This is not difficult to find, opening with a deep gully about two minutes' walk from the entrance to Broad Stand, and clearly in sight from Scafell Pike.

Of this climb Mr. Walker says: 'Our party had a meal by the spring near the top of Mickledore Ridge, and then a start for the climb was made. We soon reached the foot of the Chimney, where the rope was put on. No difficulty was experienced until we got half-way up, when the rock becomes nearly vertical. The walls of the ghyll are very smooth and covered with wet moss, so that the only way to ascend is by crawling up like a chimney-sweep. Owing to the quantity of water about, our leader had much difficulty in gaining a narrow, sloping ledge, from which he could render us some assistance. In a crack of the rock here we found a bilberry-bush with some

very fine fruit, of which half was left for the next comers. From the ledge on which we were standing a bit of overhanging rock has to be surmounted in order to gain another ledge. This cornice slopes outward towards the deep gully we had ascended, and has to be traversed in an attitude similar to that natural to one of our remote ancestors. This, though uncomfortable, was soon accomplished, and we debouched on to the ridge above Broad Stand. Those of our party who had not made the ascent had waited by the far side of Mickledore to witness our triumph, and afterwards told us that they had distinctly heard every word spoken during our ascent.'

Cust's Gully is one of the scree shoots seaming the face of Great End, as viewed from Sprinkling Tarn. The experts say that it does not present a very exciting climb except when a few inches of snow mask its shady bed in winter; but to the average man it forms an enjoyable summer ascent. The most remarkable thing about the gully is its natural rock bridge. In some remote age a boulder has attempted to rush down this way to the valley, and, the passage being too narrow, it 'chocked,' and there remains. Mr. Walker, who made the descent of the gully, says: 'Progress was a matter of considerable hazard, as all the

stones were loose, and the slightest movement set them sliding. After many attempts to poise the camera for a photo of the bridge, I found the only plan was to sit down in the stream descending the gorge, and, while gripping one leg of the tripod between my knees, to hold the other two apart with my ankles. This left my hands free to manipulate the plates, etc.'

Piers Ghyll, a deep cleft in the north shoulder of Scafell Pike, is a very famous gorge, and many an enjoyable afternoon climb will be found in it. From the vale-head beneath, as from the summit of the Pike, it looks a mere wrinkle in the massive gable of the mountain; but once entered, majestic cliffs are found rising to a great height over the splinter-strewn torrent-bed. For many years no one was able to climb the full length of this defile, owing to the stream which, in a fine cascade, occupies its whole width at the point where the ghyll opens on to the fell. During the remarkably dry summer of 1894, Dr. Collier climbed right through the water; but a dozen years before an equally determined attempt took place. Two gentlemen essayed, if possible, to overcome all obstacles, and climb right through the ghyll to the top of Lingmell Crags. In order to get through the waterfall, the unmentionables of the climbers were taken off

and packed safely away. After many hours' hard work among the traverses and pitches, the climbers had to retire with but partial success. When their temporary wardrobe, under the lee of a big boulder, was reached, one pair of nether garments was missing. When and how this came about could not be imagined; for ravens and fell sheep are not considered partial to such dainties, and other living things had not been present. Do what the pair might, the clothes could not be found; therefore an unfrequented road to Rosthwaite had to be taken, but even here the curious gray jersey costume evoked much merriment.

On another occasion, but many years earlier, an attempt was made single-handed. The climber reached the level of the force, when he dislodged a piece of rock behind him in passing. For a moment its significance did not come to him, but when it did he was amazed. The knocked-down piece of rock blocked his only retreat, and since the climb out was impossible he was in a sorry plight. For twenty-four hours he stood on that tiny ledge, not daring to move either backward or forward; but hunger at last forced him to make a tremendous dive into the pool beneath the force, and so he escaped in safety.

The ascents now to be dealt with are of a higher class, both in difficulty and danger, than those already described. The training recommended previously is now absolutely necessary, as well as a practical acquaintance with the use of the rope, while the practice obtained among the rocks of Mickledore will be valuable.

Any narrative concerning English rock-climbing would be very incomplete without a mention of the Pillar Rock, a famous excrescence on the Ennerdale side of Pillar Mountain. On all sides it presents cliffs hundreds of feet in height, and so difficult of ascent that on the east face alone is there a route climbable by anyone but experts. This is by the 'Slab and Notch,' first discovered in 1863. The more difficult west face was ascended in 1826, and the north route, which presents an almost impossible climb, fell before Mr. Haskett Smith in 1891. There are also many portions as yet unscaled. The climb by the Slab and Notch route about to be described was made from Langdale on an April day, when snow still lay in considerable beds on the higher ground. To reach the Pillar Mountain from the valley named is quite a notable excursion. After passing over Eskhause we had to climb Great Gable, and this by a very faint and narrow track, traversing the mountain front from left to right.

After a very rough scramble we reached the summit at 5.45 (having left Langdale at 2 a.m.). The sun had just risen, the air was bitterly cold, and a gale was blowing across the white expanse towards Honister. It was impossible to stay in this exposed position, so we crossed to Westmorland's caërn for a peep down the screes of Great Hell Gate, and then hurried down to Beckland. As often happens in descents, we missed the correct path, and came down an awkward slope to the col connecting Great Gable and Kirkfell, under the lee, rather than over the windy top, of which we continued our walk to Black Sail Pass. The ground was very rough, but we reached the Pillar Mountain at 8.30 a.m., and hurried down to within two hundred feet of the face on which our attack was to be directed. Lunch was welcome but hurried, as we were anxious to get to the climbing. Skirting the deceptive Pisgah face, we soon found ourselves on a ledge half-way (apparently) up the rock. Here we put on the rope (25 feet in length), and made for the Slab—a large smooth rock 40 feet in length and sloping at an angle of some thirty-seven degrees. The danger of slipping off would have been considerable had not a deep crack near the lower end afforded safe hold for our feet. Had either of us made a slip here, however, we would have slid

straight over the edge into the scree doup some hundreds of feet below.

The Notch was distinctly in view above; the crag up to it was steep, but the handhold so secure that it made quite an easy task. The Notch itself presents some difficulty, for the ledge on which you cross is not broad, the crag above bulges out uncomfortably, and the drop into the gulf beside you is considerable. The passage was soon over, and we were looking down into the Great Chimney, from which a short walk up a grass slope led us to the foot of the Small Chimney, the ascent of which is not difficult, and the caërn on the summit was reached. Here we had a long rest, and amused ourselves by reading the names on the cards which are stowed in a tin box under a large stone. In a few minutes we had reached our starting-point, and commenced our return to Langdale. The path now leads past the caërn and iron cross (now almost buried in the scree which slides in plenty from the crags above), erected to the memory of the Rev. James Jackson, the Patriarch of the Pillar, so well loved of our older cragsmen. The old man's playful character may be gauged from the fact that when starting for his third ascent of the Pillar Rock in May, 1878, when he was eighty-two years of age, he took with him a bottle containing the following memo-

randum, which he evidently intended to deposit on the top :

> 'Two elephantine properties are mine,
> For I can bend to pick up pin or plack,
> And when this year the Pillar Rock I climb,
> Four score and two's the howdah on my back.'

His design, however, was not accomplished, for on the way he slipped over a crag on the west face, and fell three hundred yards to the place where Auld Will Ritson's search-party found his body. There is no fitter place among his beloved mountains for a memento of the man who, in the last years of a long life, fell so completely in love with crag-climbing, than the quiet scree-strewn cove almost within the shadow of the majestic Rock.

Deep Ghyll is the name of a huge recess in the breast of Scafell, with its mouth in the scree-channel of Lord's Rake and stupendous rock walls on both banks. The first pitch or section of the climb is closed by a huge boulder, which, having become fixed in a narrow part of the gully, makes a sort of small cavern. This piece seems difficult at first, but if the climber enters the darkened space and emerges by way of a smaller stone which has caught between the main cliff and the blocked rock, he will find a scanty hold above, whereby, after a few seconds' struggle, the first pitch of the ascent is accomplished.

Mr. A. S. Walker, on whose diary part of this chapter is based, thus describes his ascent : 'The first pitch of this ghyll appears very difficult at first sight ; indeed, for a time I had not the slightest idea how to ascend it. However, I negotiated it at length, and then hauled up my companion. As soon as he was safe, I descended the pitch and set up the camera on a small terrace, commanding a splendid view of the ghyll and its surroundings.' This ledge has a melancholy interest to all crag-climbers, for it was by a slip from it that Professor Milnes Marshall met his death in December, 1893. The Professor and his companions had just unroped after a successful descent of the crags, and were making towards Wastdalehead, when he slipped and fell some three hundred feet.

'The camera, after two plates had been exposed, was packed in the rucksac and hauled up by my friend. This time I found the ascent quite easy, and wondered at the difficulty I had experienced half an hour before.' In the second pitch the eye is struck by a huge overhanging slab in the very centre of the ghyll, which seems effectually to bar all further progress. The obvious way of climbing the ghyll is by avoiding the deeper portion, and wriggling up a small chimney to the left.

'This Hastwell proceeded to do while I fixed

the camera on a very insecure grass ledge in a position whence I could photograph him on the way up. When I thought everything was ready, I found that my plates were on the other side of the camera (about a yard away), and do what I would I could not reach them until I had taken the camera down again. This will give an idea of the narrowness of the ledge, and of the difficulties attaching to a studio of this variety. However, I got a view, and climbed to the top of the pitch. Hastwell was glad of the rope I lowered, for he had been kept in the chimney, wedged in one position, for nearly an hour, and I had almost to haul him up. Another hour was spent in getting the camera up, and when the top of the ghyll was finally reached we were quite ready for a rest.'

Another grand climb on Scafell is the Pillar, which divides the Deep Ghyll (just mentioned) from Steep Ghyll, a much more formidable climb. The Pillar is overlooked by a rock dubbed Pisgah, from which an easy descent is made to the Jordan Gap, which separates the pinnacle from the main cliff; this circumstance it possesses in common with the Ennerdale Pillar. The connecting link is a sharp rock-ledge, about a yard in width, and with magnificent vertical views down both sides. As the climbers reach the ledge the rope is usually

put on, for there is a nasty corner where the body has to be hauled by hand power alone to the top of an overhanging slab. This task is rendered a trifle safer by a convenient crack, into which the fingers of the left hand can be inserted. The crack slopes to the left for about five feet, when the hold has to be transferred to a crevice about two feet lower. After sliding along another short space (all the while without any assistance from the feet), the edge of the main cliff is reached. Here, by merely letting go, you can get into the Wastdale Valley (about two thousand feet beneath) in something under four seconds. The rope may be secured to a conveniently placed rock on 'the mainland' so as to lessen the danger, but there is no possible relief for the arms. The whole climb is done by hands alone, and is therefore very fatiguing. It will be readily observed from this that a serious course of dumb-bells to develop the arm and shoulder muscles is as much a *sine quâ non* to the climber as a clear head and abundant energy.

The most sensational and most popular climb in the whole district is the Napes Needle. The frontispiece gives a striking view of this enormous fiddle-shaped aiguille, precariously disposed on the west face of Great Napes—a pile of precipices clearly visible from Wastdalehead. The

Needle was first climbed in 1886, but, of course, when once a route was discovered, it became soon tolerably easy for anyone with sufficient strength to follow. The route to the base of the crag from Wastdalehead presents an interesting but exhausting scramble to the man who has to carry some quantity of impedimenta, and usually occupies one and a half hours. A walk along a fairly broad ledge —here be very careful that the correct terrace is selected, as there are so many identical in appearance —brings the climber to the base of the Needle. 'While the remainder of the party discussed the best methods of attack, I fixed the camera on a small grass ledge known as "the dress circle," on account of its convenient situation for viewing the coming performance. After this I took my place on the rope, and led the ascent.'

The route is at first easy. Where it rounds the corner the rock bulges out considerably, and this portion is so difficult that few short men are able to manage it, being unable to reach as high as the handhold. The advice of one who has been 'through the mill' is valuable, and the presence of a vigilant friend next you on the rope is very reassuring. However, this corner is the most dangerous in the ascent, although, of course, a fall from the crag at any point would be fatal. Once out of the crack a ledge is reached on which there

is room for three or four persons standing, and from these the leader should get abundant help to overcome the final difficulty. This consists in hauling one's self, by hands alone, on to a ledge hardly as wide as an ordinary mantelpiece, then straightening up and shuffling—there is not room to walk—along this traverse with no handhold at all. The step from the end of this ledge to the front face of the top boulder (the crag is in three pieces) requires great care, but the projection on which you depend is large enough to hold both toes during the brief space occupied in reaching for the top. Of course, the final pull is by the arms alone, and, considering previous exertions, is hard work until, with a mighty heave, you sprawl across the summit breathless. Once the leader has established himself he can make the climb much easier and quite safe for the rest of the party. He can also assist their descent, and when his own turn comes, by throwing the rope over the boulder to the opposite side of the rock, where the others are standing, can lower himself in safety.

The view from the summit merits a few words of description, though we cannot do more than mention the bolder beauties of the scene. Across the narrow valley are the tremendous buttresses and scree-beds of the Scafell range; down to

the left is the dull gleam of Wastwater, with the greener shoulder of the screes; behind you, pile upon pile, rises the huge composite cliff known as Great Napes; while right and left are inaccessible-looking faces of bare rock. Glancing straight beneath, the climber is astounded: he is clinging to a mere pin-point-like summit over a tremendous gulf, at the bottom of which, seeming blue and distant, is Wastdale. A stumble when he straightened himself on that narrow ledge by which he came up would have precipitated him into that abyss; a merely careless step would do it now. It speaks strongly for the caution and dexterity, as well as for the pluck and nerve, of our cragsmen that there are not more accidents among the crags of the Cumberland mountains.

From the descriptions given, we hope to have shown it possible to have a good time in climbing among the different crags without being in any way an expert. All the ascents named are reachable from Wastdalehead, Borrowdale, or Langdale, and can be climbed within a day's tour. Many pleasurable excursions will be found in the immediate vicinity of those described, but we must add a warning that ere you ascend a crag for which your Climbers' Guide does not contain directions, be sure that you can find the way down again.

Little of the enjoyment of crag-climbing is lost, and a number of valuable mementos gained, by linking with it the art of photography. The camera may be troublesome to haul about, but it is also a splendid preventive of the insane desire to rush through without noticing the rough beauties of the ghylls and crags.

CHAPTER IV

A MAY-DAY RAMBLE

From the valley road—itself an unimportant connection through a countryside dotted with woods—the way up lies at first through tree-embowered lanes. Beneath the tall hedgerows the delicate purple-veined white anemone flourishes side by side with the pale primrose. The long narrow leaves of the bluebell are unfolding through last autumn's dead litter, and soon every dell in the woodland will be carpeted with their blue. The old wall to our left is at first fringed with hazel and elder bushes, the buds of the latter just bursting while the catkins dangle in profusion on the former; a little further is a polled ash, with straight, bare saplings, still destitute of leaves. Some yards on, where the loose mossy wall gives place to a wattled hedge, slender graceful wands of willow rise; the bush finds deep and congenial roothold in the banks of a tiny beck. The morning sunshine is darkened as we enter a

copse; the wide-spreading sycamores are in full but tender leaf, gluey calyxes still tip the twigs of the horse-chestnut. The oak is here in abundance, its leaves far opened, while at every shake of the gentle breeze the dead brown scales which so long protected the bud waft far and wide. The field we are passing was a stagnant pond not long ago, and the glossy leaves of the kingcup still spring up annually among the grass. The wood beyond was a rabbit warren, but now the undergrowth which secured retirement is torn up, and the game has gone away. A splendid circle of beeches is on our other hand; in this dale many such groves crown the hillocks, or stand in the fields, ever separate from other trees.

The lane winds on: sometimes a hedgerow of sloe-trees is passed, or a damp green bed of the evil-smelling ramp, interspersed with unfolding leaves of the devil's rhubarb and the dead stems of burdock, a panacea for all ills among local herbalists. Numerous small warblers flit up and down the roadway in mock panic at our approach; their nests are secure from touch, if not from view, in the depths of the stout hawthorn hedge. There will be found the pale-blue eggs of the hedge-sparrow in its thorn-fortified nest; four or five spotted pale-red eggs in the home, artfully constructed without of moss and within lined with

stray wisps of wool and hair, of the chaffinch; the delicate white, spotted-red eggs of the robin, with, maybe, half a dozen more varieties, ranging from the modest wren, nesting in a grass-hidden crevice, to the more lordly homes of the blackbird and throstle in the upper branches of the hedge.

The ivy-hung farmstead passed, the path upwards becomes steeper, and we are appreciably rising. Soon the dale is at our feet, and our outlook widens till, between two abrupt limestone mountains, we see, across the level mosslands, the sea. Northward and westward are the grand pyramids of the Lake Mountains, from Red Screes to Black Combe; to the south-east a long sequence of moors dwindle in altitude from Whinfell Beacon to tree-covered Arnside Knott, against one slope of which sleeps the glittering ocean. Our interests lie less in this, however, than in what we are to see at the head of the hillside we are gradually ascending. Passing a tiny hut, used as a gun-room by former generations of sportsmen—of whom also the abandoned hound-kennels at the highest house are memorial—the green lane dives between two dense fir-woods. As we pass along, the cool silence of the woodland settles round: the bleating of the sheep on the pastures, the lowing of the cattle from the valley farms, even the wild callings of the plover winging above

sound dull and distant, while, to succeed them, comes the soft cooing of the wood-pigeons, the stealthy rustle of rabbits in the undergrowth, and the gentle sweeping of branches together in the wind. Suddenly in front appears a gate, and we are on the wide moorland. Contrasted with the silence of the fir-wood, this palpitates with life, light, and movement. Wiry fell-sheep are cropping the short grass; moor-hens whisk up from the heather-tufts, clamouring wildly as they wing away; the herons and curlews—birds, apparently, doomed to find no rest, since day and night, from season to season, they are perpetually voyaging to and from the fells — shriek and whistle overhead; a solitary wagtail, standing on a rock outcrop, seems to find difficulty in keeping balance between his short body and unwieldy tail, so flicks off, with an impatient twitter, to try his luck on some more favourable spot. Gray-and-white stonechats busy themselves near the slackly built fell walls, flying off wildly to seek nest-building material, and as wildly returning and placing what they have brought in position. In the seven hundred feet climbed from the dale we have passed a month backwards in the calendar of nature; birds which in the copses behind us have laid their eggs are only thinking of building their nests here; the green lush of the fields is replaced by the wan

gray of departing winter among the short grass; not a bloom is to be seen on bog or brae. It is yet April on the fells, though May has come to the valleys.

We walk steadily on till we are in the midst of the moors. That shaft of stone to our right was one of a long sequence, few of which, however, still remain, marking the boundary of an assize road, along which in ancient times suitors were wont to pass who had business at the courts of the county town. Here and there it is traceable along the hill-sides, at some places still used as a sledge or cart track, at others a broad path among the heather alone shows where it lies. Another more famous road is in sight, along which streamed the rebels of the 'Forty-Five on their ill-fated journey southward, and again in their retreat northwards. But long prior to this the way was famous, as along it moss-troopers passed in their raids. That hollow 'gate' between Whiteside Common and Bannisdale Fell has been the scene of many a fierce conflict, as the northmen (who were *not* always Scotch) essayed to enter the vale of Kent from the narrow depth of Lunesdale. Along this road at a later period thundered the four and six horse mail coaches, their speed and size a wonder to the simple dwellers of the country-side. At one point by this highway was an inn between two hills,

where the occupants of the coach were used to alight and refresh themselves before commencing to walk the steep ascent facing them either north or south. One night, however, the coach, rushing down the incline, did not slow down at the white-walled inn. The landlord rushed out as the great vehicle lumbered by, to see the coachman lashing his horses and gathering up his reins as the steep hill was faced. Up, up in the starlight the coach climbed, the horses gradually slowing, but never being allowed to stop, though the road was rugged and almost precipitous. Across the valley, some half-mile below, a single horseman was spurring at great speed, apparently racing for the pass into which the coach was gradually struggling. 'A highwayman!' said the landlord—he had little to rejoice at in the sight. Gin the coach be robbed or not, he might expect a visit from the highwayman, who, if the house were not immediately opened to him, would use his pistols without compunction. The lights of the vehicle gradually dragged up the swelling hillside; the pursuing horseman gained rapidly. A projecting corner of the hill was passed, and the race disappeared from the view of the anxious landlord.

In those days there were no fences to the road, so that it was possible for the horseman to ride some way parallel with the coach, then gradually

converge on it as the summit of the pass was reached. The guard, in his terror, hurled his blunderbuss from the coach the moment the horseman appeared at the same level. Nothing could save the passengers now, it seemed; but just as the rider encouraged his steed to a final effort, the poor brute was seen to deflect from the course its rider wished. With a sharp jerk, he pulled the horse's head round; there was a sudden rearing and a heavy thud, as horse and rider went over together. The highwayman, in his haste, had forgotten a narrow but deep ghyll which here cuts down the 'gate,' dividing the main-road from one long disused. The coach, thus freed from danger, rolled on. It seems that the driver, in crossing the dreary fell, had noted the sinister rider, who preferred the old Roman way to the new turnpike, and, divining the intention to plunder the coach, he had put on all speed, saving the usual stop at the inn, and thereby escaping. Next day the dead horse was found without saddle or bridle; its owner had made off as rapidly as possible.

While this story has been telling, the scene around has gradually developed, and we stand on the summit of the hill. Deep beneath is the valley; in all directions mountains, near and far, with here and there a wooded eminence between. Reston Scar there, with a gray patch on its

shoulder, showing where lies the tarn of blue and yellow water-lilies; Crag Quarter there, that haunt of wily foxes, the foremost summit of which overlooks the birthplace of Bernard Gilpin, 'the Apostle of the North,' who so narrowly escaped martyrdom at the hands of Queen Mary. Gilpin was, indeed, ordered to London from his parish in Durham, but when riding through the Fen country his horse, missing its footing, fell upon him, breaking his thigh. Surgery in those days was too valuable to waste on a man doomed to the stake, so that, in spite of the Queen's peremptory orders, he could not travel further for some months. And in this period the Queen died, and with her successor came a merciful reaction so far as Bernard Gilpin's life was concerned. Many old halls and ancient fortified farms are in sight from this point, though Arnside Tower and Burneside Hall are the chief cattle keeps. Kendal Castle is on a hill just outside the town, its ruined walls flanked by a dense wood plainly in view over a church steeple. But in the centre there is Ratten Heath, the scene of the most striking episode in Border history. Shortly after James I. came to the throne of England, he set up a claim to all the small estates in Cumberland and Westmorland, on the plea that the 'statesmen were merely the tenants of the Crown. The 'statesmen

met to the number of 2,000 at Ratten Heath, between Kendal and Staveley, where they came to the resolution that 'they had won their lands by the sword, and were able to hold them by the same.' After that meeting's defiance no further claim was made to the estates on the part of the Crown. It should, perhaps, be added that the 'statesmen mustered chiefly on the King's side when the great Civil War convulsed the country seventy years later.

In twenty minutes we are across the moor, disturbing several brace of grouse as we pass along. This little patch, where the heather is just beginning to regrow, used not so many years ago to be annually sown with oats to provide food for the game in winter. A gang of poachers visited this point some months back. Three inches of snow had fallen, and in the tiny clearing just the tops of the short heather were visible. Birds had flocked here, where the food was freshest, from the surrounding moor, and the poachers drove heavy charges of shot into the startled coveys from where they hid in the ling-beds. The number of birds thus bagged must have been enormous. In the tiny bay just beneath a school of wild-duck are lazily swimming about, but as soon as our presence is detected up rises the main body with wild cries, though one or two

seek the shelter of the reed-beds. We hear these exchanging low signals as, for a moment or two, we stand by the water's edge. By a narrow path we make our way to the boat-house, and unchain the old craft floating there. The morning is bright and warm, and the row promises to be delightful. And to me it is delightful, though the surface is covered with weeds and the old boat leaks somewhat freely. A couple of months on, and that weeded bay will be studded with white water-lobelia, those rush-beds will be spangled with blue iris ; from the bottom of the mere new growths of water-grass are rapidly rising to take the place of the dead tangle through which we force our float. In front is a tree-covered islet, and a few strong pulls brings the boat's iron nose crunching against its stony marge. A long line between two trees forms the cemetery of such vermin as the gamekeeper has captured. The place does not smell very vile after all, and we approach the gibbeted carcasses closely. Here and there are two or three jays, almost fresh, with their beautiful under-wings still untarnished by weather, four kestrels, one buzzard, and three sparrow-hawks. Of course, there are half a score magpies dangling on the line, in close company with several bodies of that other inveterate egg-thief, the carrion crow. The keeper's vigilance

in other directions is vouched for by the presence of three weasels, one stoat (quite newly killed, and with its coat at perfection), and two foxes. A few years ago one might have discovered an owl among the victims, but the present keeper knows his friends too well to shoot one. The tarn is well known for fishing, but the trout come late into season (in August), and perch do not tempt us, so no line is wetted to-day.

CHAPTER V

IN TROUBLED WATERS: FLOOD FISHING IN MAY-TIME

The spring had been rather dry, and the mountain becks even had presented but few spates. Snow lingered long on the high fells, and while its 'broth' tainted the streams the fish were loath to rise at worm or fly. But one evening I dipped a worm into a pool beneath the bridge, which showed clearly the greasy gray surcharge of snow-water, and was immediately rewarded with a bite. The light had been failing rapidly, and it was with difficulty that I saw enough of my surroundings to prevent a pound trout getting away with some portion of my tackle. His tactics on being hooked were sudden and disconcerting. He sulked and rushed from slack to current and back again, agilely swerving to right and left, now endeavouring to foul my line among the submerged rocks or my rod-point among the overgrowing alders. After ten lively minutes he tired in his

mad efforts, and at last allowed himself to drown in quite tame fashion. He was a fine fellow, well-fed, and quite worthy the struggle.

There is one good, if selfish, point in the caprices of such a season to the angler who can spare the few hours necessary whenever his particular beck is in condition. During the dry days the food-supplies on land multiply exceedingly, so that when a heavy shower does come, much of this store is washed out into the streams. From the lake great gray trout sweep up to meet the feast; in the tarn above is great activity, some of the brown residents falling through a smother of cascades down to the valley-becks, others stringing up the tiny rivulets supplying their home waters. All are come to feed, not in the wary, dainty manner as when they taste flies on a balmy summer evening, but with open mouth, taking reckless toll from the food-specked flood.

One evening last week rain began to fall. During the night we heard the rising boom of the gale, and the great curtains of falling water slashing against wall and roof and window; then through the lulls in the storm came the hoarse, low rush of supercharged becks, a cheering sound to the angler's ear. In the morning the valley resounded to the music of waters. Down every hillside torrents, their courses marked only yesterday by

thin descending threads, were dashing and roaring ; cascades were everywhere, seen through springing verdure, seen in the dusky depths of the narrow rock ravines, or seen flashing down bracken-hung slopes with bright sunshine playing on their creamy volumes. Naturally, our first excursion was down the steep garden to where yesterday we looked into a deep, still, clear pool. Here the bustling valley beck meets the sluggish lake-waters, and ancient anglers tell us that this pool is a piscatorial barometer, the state of its waters and the predilections of its occupants being reliable clues to the sport obtaining in upper waters. The beck was in roaring mood, driving turgid currents right through the pool, and even stirring tumult on the distant lake. The stream had risen six or eight feet during the night ; the boat landing was completely submerged. A local angler was striding up the road at great pace even thus early, and on being approached offered to conduct us to the best positions for sport. 'Mind you,' he said in his rich, picturesque dialect, 'you can likely get good fish from any slack water to-day, but I'll show you the surest bits.' A few yards on he turned into a field, on which the rising water had encroached. A rib of rock here divided the valley, narrowing the overpent stream and causing a big pool to collect. The abrupt crag in which it terminated

was covered with dwarf oaks and birches, among the lowermost trunks of which the flood was swirling. I anticipated operations here, but our guide shouted through the deafening rush that we must try to reach an isolated branch of the outcrop to our left. I could see the place he meant: a gray-green patch of grass barely covering black, mossy rock, but a channel running like a mill-stream lay between. This was to be leapt, and our friend remarked that it was deep as well as strong.

Nine feet may not seem much to leap, measured on an athletic ground, but when the take-off is a soft mossy bank, the landing-point possibly treacherous and certainly slippery, and the jumper hampered by want of space and by bulky impedimenta, the task becomes a difficult one. The local leapt big and landed comfortably. J. followed; as he landed his footing gave way, and he slipped back knee-deep into the race-like channel. The dalesman, however, was alert, and saved him from being washed away. Now I essayed the aerial passage, skimming over the water in a low, long jump and landing securely all fours on the rock. Here I stood a moment surveying the scene. The stream was so flooded that its main current was diverted against the rock on which we stood. The water came down at tremendous pressure, the crests of the giant waves often dash-

ing right over our narrow foothold. It was not a pleasant position to be in if the flood rose still higher. The local had got his line in by this ; I asked him whether he thought there was any danger of the water rising over this rock. The man raised his bait from the surges, and looked me squarely in the face. 'If it does rise it'll be a job getting off, but it's not going to rise.' And he applied himself to the art again.

Seeing that the position had to be accepted, I put on a worm and began fishing. The big trout coming up from the lake pause in the slack pool behind White Water Rock, and to get these was our aim. In a few minutes J.'s voice rose over the sound of surges. He had hooked something. 'Pull it to the right,' called the dalesman, removing, it seemed, one eye's attention from his own work for my friend's benefit. I saw J. put on the requisite strain, but it was too late. The big fish, on finding itself hooked, had dashed into mid-stream, and as it was hurled away in the waters, the gut parted. The local next hooked. The moment he felt the bite he began jerking steadily upwards and forwards, keeping the fish on the move, and drawing it away from the strong water. In a minute there was a splash on the boiling pool, and a fine lake-trout came to land. The others had got two apiece before my first

came. A score times I had followed down an eddy in which I was confident a fish was lying. Once my bait was rushed at, but not taken. The jerk ultimately caught me unawares, and I had to slacken line somewhat. Then the struggle began. The dead weight on my lengthened line was great, but I worked my fish forward as opportunity occurred. Once it came almost to the surface, but not quickly enough to use the slack thus gained in my line in getting into the current. At every chance I wound up a little, gradually gaining control, and ultimately getting the fish to land. It proved to be nearly the record brown trout of the district, and I had reason to be proud of it and its strong fight.

After an hour's fishing we had twenty-eight fish for the three rods, counting all sizes, and claimed nine 'breaks.' But it was fine sport, though so productive, and each fish gave a lively struggle. The dalesman had a splendid run of luck. After panniering one fish, he rebaited and dropped his line in a nice swirl at about rod's length from him; the worm could not have sunk six inches before his rod was bending under a fresh capture. A simple playing had the trout ashore in some half minute. Another worm was dropped with the same result, and the pannier received three fine fish in less than two minutes.

The dalesman wished us to go up stream some way ; the nicest fish, he said, did not frequent such rough waters, and the lake-trout were inferior in quality to the genuine inhabitants of the becks. The return from our rock was easier than I had anticipated, though we had now each an extra weight to convey. As we strolled along the sodden fields our companion entertained us with narratives of fishing in bygone days. He could remember the giant *Salmo ferox* running up from the lake in flood-time. His grandfather had told him of the ancient sport of spearing when these came up to spawn in autumn.

The point he had selected for our trial was where a little beck from the fells joined the parent stream. The waters were running fairly free of mud, and our five trout were all game fighters. As we fished this quiet backwater, there was more leisure for contemplation than in the great whirlpool beneath White Water Rock. Here I watched one half-pounder quietly glide over a submerged patch of yellow kingcups, and settle itself just within the reach of my bait. The worm did not attract it, for it was taking a tiny aquatic mollusc with which the water abounded, but finally it came forward with a rush. I struck, thinking I felt the slight tremor of a bite, and was surprised at the effect. The fish had really ignored my worm,

going right past it, but my jerk brought the hook home in its side. I spent half an hour trying to land it; so scant a hold had the hook that I had to humour my fish's every movement. And all the time that clump of kingcups swayed beneath the stream, my hooked fish generally floating above them. Patience has an end, so I got J. to sink his landing-net behind the trout while I tried to bring it to the surface. My attempt was only partially successful, but J. swept up his implement, and the trout was caught.

The river by this time was falling as rapidly as it had risen; cataracts and torrents disappeared one by one from the bare fellsides, and the sun which found a deluged dale left it with waters running at almost normal height.

CHAPTER VI

BACK TO THE FELLS

THERE are two separate migrations of sheep to the fells after winter. The first, that of half-grown wethers, occurs as soon as the uplands are sufficiently clear of snow. Indeed, where the heaf is near the homestead, it is customary to keep these hardier and less valuable animals out on the uplands during the whole of winter, supplementing their pickings with hay and roots during the severest weather. The second and more important movement is when the ewes and their young lambs are transferred in early June. Let me explain that during the past half-century the system of sheep-farming here has undergone considerable changes, and that many of the most rugged and characteristic sheep-walks have become detached, for various reasons, from the dales-farms, the occupiers of which held very ancient heaf-rights. For example, the main part of the 'dark brow of mighty Helvellyn' was for years rented

by a farmer whose homestead was in the Hawkshead district, some eighteen miles away. The work of driving the flock to the sheep-walk was here at all times difficult, but particularly so in the case of the ewes and lambs.

A faint flush was fringing the distant hills as we walked up the narrow, stony lane towards the rough pastures, whence over twelve hundred sheep and lambs were to be taken. Though the sun was not yet risen, all Nature was astir, and the air was full of bird-song. Near the gate in the lane our dogs, which had been following gravely at heel, made a dash forward. They had gone to collect the sheep. By the time we arrived sheep and lambs were sauntering down the bush-dotted slope towards us, and from unseen distances came the sound of barking as the three dogs hurried forward the outliers. When a bleating mob had collected, and the dogs showed over the nearest bluff (having almost completed their work), my companion opened the gate at which we stood, saying, 'Count 'em as they pass.' There was a drawing back of the sheep nearest us as the gate swung on its rusty hinges, a moment of hesitation, then the vanguard, urged on by those behind, bolted into the gap, which in a few seconds was jammed by a struggling woolly mass. The flock took some minutes to pass us, even at this speed ;

then, as a final straggler rushed past, my companion announced that the whole number had come, and, shutting the gate, turned down the narrow lane, where our day's charge were slowly recovering from their fright.

As we turned into the main road, just below where it dives deep into the pine woods, we saw the first rays of sunshine gild here and there a summit in the distant mountain barrier. The air was crisp and earth-smelling, the dust in the roadway weighted with the dew of the previous night ; trees and hedgerows had not yet lost the fresh verdure of early summer. Our flock moved steadily and rapidly along, though we did not force it to speed. Thus for two miles, till the village town of Hawkshead was reached. It was hard work trying to keep moving directly among the maze of lanes and courts opening on the main street. So early no one was astir to assist us. The animals crowded together into such a press that it was hard at times to make any progress. Where the buildings left a particularly narrow way we had to force the timid leaders on by mercilessly harrying their companions behind. How the thin, plaintive bleats of the lambs, backed by the full-throated calls of their elders, rang through the narrow thoroughfares and echoed among the irregularly built

houses. After one or two breaks-away, we got the flock beyond the streets and into the open country, where they moved more staidly. For three miles the road ascends the low hills bounding the dale, to an eminence from which the waters of Esthwaite could be seen gleaming in the early sunshine. The sky was clear-blue, the air growing warmer. At the sound of our flock approaching, blackbirds and throstles, hedge-sparrows and wrens, deserted their nests in the hedges and banks, darting away silently or with noisy vociferations, as is their various natures. Soon we were in a district where many sheep are kept. As our flock approached, the occupants of the rough enclosures lifted their heads from the short grass they were nibbling and gave out loud choruses of bleats, to each one of which our flock would make reply. This was kept up on both sides for a long while. We were almost a mile away, driving in the shade of a thick wood, when on the wind came a last faint signal. Our sheep, which had become quiet and orderly, paused, heads were turned to the current which brought this farewell, then all burst into a wild series of bleatings, which echoed and re-echoed through green ride and waving wood.

The road now dipped steeply into the vale of Brathay, crossing at the mouth of the great ravine

by which the river escapes from Elter Water and the rock-girt Langdales. The flock choked the narrow cross-lane thence to the Grasmere road from bank to bank, carrying away green, prickly brambles by scores on their fleeces. After driving half a mile, gradually rising, we opened on to the wider road, high up the slope towards Hunting Stile. The green bracken beds on Loughrigg were swaying in the faint breeze ; beneath, a tarn gleamed in the sunshine ; around, dense woods of fir and oak and birch extended, with here and there a small pasture culled from their verdant bosom, or some high rock on which no plant could establish itself. At Red Bank we were almost half-way on our journey. Eight miles had occupied some three hours, not bad speed for a flock containing so many lambs. Therefore we breakfasted with vast content from the store we had pocketed, while our flock wandered over a tiny patch by the roadside.

As we descended nearer the village of Grasmere, where traffic is heavier, the sheep stirred up a tremendous cloud of dust, through which we had to follow, gasping and choking when particularly thick wreaths whirled up. Before we had gone a mile our clothes were quite white. As we worked across the narrow dale, more people were astir ; the heat and dust grew worse. The sheep, too, were

more inclined to straggle. A few ewes and lambs began falling hopelessly behind from sheer exhaustion. From the Ambleside road, on which we were now converging, a long dust-cloud was rising, and the commotion among our sheep made us confident that another flock was astir. Nearer and nearer we approached the road junction, and the babel of bleating increased minutely. When the other shepherd got within earshot, he called out that his sheep were fresh, and asked to be allowed to lead. We therefore halted that he might precede us by some little distance. Our post, at the tail of a procession of some 2,000 animals, was an uncomfortable one. The heat and stour was stifling, yet some sort of control had to be kept, else the stronger leaders would have been far ahead. After a long, slow tramp, we at last passed the tiny Traveller's Rest, and came to the gateway of the bridle path to the open fell. At the near sight of green, unenclosed slopes our sheep made every effort to get ahead. Possibly they thought this the end of their long journey, though in reality five miles still lay before we reached the resting heaf. A stony, uneven path led steeply into a recess of the mountains. Stonechats flew and chattered from the rough stone wall ; skylarks carolled high above us, for the rough grass tufts of the intakes are their

favourite nesting-place ; and the dipper flashed and jerked from pool to pool and from fosse to fosse in the rocky ghyll to our right. In a few minutes we reached the open fell, and my companion, after sending the dogs round the flock, sank down to a well-deserved rest. The collies would see to it that no fleece of ours strayed away nor stranger joined our ranks.

From the lichened rock on which I sat there was a splendid view. All trace of human habitation and of the dale just quitted had disappeared. All around were steep hillsides, some with alternating belts of green bracken and purple heather, others covered with gray scree-beds or studded with huge boulders. Helm Crag's shoulder showed an abrupt boundary to the gulf of the hidden dale, while the cliffs on Seat Sandal rose, it seemed, but a hundred yards away. My comrade had little eye for the rugged beauty of a scene to which he was so accustomed, but there was genuine love of Nature in the small things to which he drew my attention—to the harebells daintily curtseying by the side of the brook, to the beautiful structure of the flowers with which the many ling-tufts were decked, to the 'mountain-violet' flourishing by the marge of a perpetual spring. The myriad beetles did not escape him, big fellows cased in metallic hues, and lesser livelier

ones in glossy black, the bracken-clock and the thunder-clock. Other insects—hoppers, crawlers, fliers—he was pointing out. From the blue, cloudless vault came the shriek of a hawk as it wheeled above the dale. Then his keen eye espied a pair of ravens crossing in the bright sunshine to a nest among the rocky gables of Seat Sandal.

At noon my companion rose from among the fern, and, as he whistled, our dogs rose from their posts. Our flock responded to the call unwillingly, protestingly; yet the long rest had done them good, and there were now no stragglers to push along. Up the pass we drove, our front at first extending among the brackens, then, as the rugged pass-head neared, gradually drawing in to the few definite paths among the boulders and parsley fern. At the head of the ghyll we had to drive through a narrow gap in the wall, a proceeding which requires patience. The break in the mountains allowing the pass into Patterdale showed grandly on our right; grass-grown Dolly Waggon confronted at close distance by the savage screes and gullies of Fairfield. Our correct path, I thought, would lie down the pass, but the shepherd elected to drive 'o'er the rough moss and o'er the trackless waste' of short, springy fell-grass around the basin of Grisedale Tarn. It was

a grand sight to see him marshal the long breast of sheep, each knot taking a distinct route, and, by a few whistles and waving to his dogs, herd the whole crowd in a new direction when needed. At the shepherd's call I made my way round the left of the flock to open the gate at the top of the Pike, and a few minutes after my arrival the foremost sheep climbed the steep base into sight. There was no doubt that many ewes and lambs were almost exhausted, and I could not help contrasting the rush and scare with which they left the home intake at daybreak to their mechanical wandering now. Still, they were a pretty sight, and I felt rather sorry when the shepherd drove the last straggler past.

With dogs now at heel, now high among the splintered rocks, we patrolled the mountain-side, looking over the thousand wethers brought up by way of Wythburn during March. That spring day's work will be ever memorable. When we started the stars glished down on ice-bound roads and rime-covered fields. At daybreak the cloud-banks mustered in the south-west, and, as we were crossing Dunmail Raise, the sky belched down wild whirls of snow. Our flock, thus storm-struck, could hardly be driven forward.

We were glad to find our wethers in fair con-

dition. A few had to be attended to for various ills ; one had been drowned in a deep rock-pool in Clark's Beck Ghyll, two others crushed to death by a fall of stones on Striding Edge ; but these are usual casualties among fell-sheep.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT RIDE IN LAKELAND

Just before ten o'clock we pedalled slowly through straggling Coniston. We had lain long abed in the morning, and in the afternoon lazily spoiled many good baits in fishing. A few perch and trout had lain in the boat as the result of our lackadaisical exertions. The day had been hot, and the cool of evening was very refreshing. We watched the sun set in a dull bank of clouds, then turned in for supper and preparations. The sky was still bright in the west, and the lake's surface reflected its dying fires; a thin mist was rising from every thread of water, forming a night-cloud which hid from our view the great hill-tops. How silent the countryside! The creep of our tyres in the dust, the rasping churr of the night-jar, as it hawked the trees in the roadside for insects, were the only sounds. But stay, there is the murmur of Yewdale beck behind a brake of tangled coppice, and soft, but

clear and melodious, the white-throat is recommencing his song. Commonplace and unnoticed by day, when heard in the dun midnight, proceeding from some tush of water-grass, it amply gains him the title of the fisherman's nightingale. We are now travelling close to the crags of Yewdale, with their shaggy beard of coppice, haunt and hold of fox and owl alike. A melancholy bird-note sounds down the road, and as we wheel along, the owl is espied in the topmost branches of a lofty oak, its bulky body strongly outlined against the sky.

The shafts of light thrown by our cycle-lamps prove the immense number of nocturnal insects beneath this canopy of ash, beech, sycamore, and oak ; and every now and again some one larger than the rest whirls itself, attracted, to be broken against the glass of our lamps. As we rise out of the valley, the road becomes steep, and as there is no cause for haste we dismount. How sweet the scene ! A laggard hay-cart is moving slowly along the fields, and from around it comes a sleepy murmur of voices. The farmer in these dales cannot wait for sunshine, provided his grass be in fit condition for moving. He makes a grand effort to get all into the barn before the inevitable rain comes. Out by three in the morning, he is at work as long as there is sufficient light,

thus removing enormous quantities of hay each day. At the end of the hay harvest there is a very necessary relapse from such strains. The heather-bell has closed its purple and white corolla for the night, the bat twitters about among the few fir-trees near the top of Oxenfell Cross, and the owls hoot from distant farmsteads. A silvery moon has risen in the east, frosting the ground with hoary light, and giving a deeper blue to the star-bespangled sky.

At the top of the pass we pause a moment to note 'the mountains against heaven's grave weight rise up and grow to wondrous height,' then mount for the descent of a somewhat dangerous hill. Now to the right we can faintly see the depression of Great Langdale, surrounded by gigantic mountains rough with crags, and nearer below is the shimmer of Elter Water. A pheasant, which had roosted in the trees overhanging the road, affrighted at the approach of our lights, rockets high in the air, his screaming, choking note re-echoing over the dark and silent woods. As we walk down Skelwith Brow, the glow-worm's steady light attracts our attention, though we have passed scores between here and Coniston. In the cleft just over the hill is the Force ; we feel that its booming note is softened in accordance with the atmosphere of night, the state of rest and repose.

A silvery gleam tells us that Winder Mere is near, and after two miles' run we are by Rothay Bridge, looking down its glittering length. The only occupants of its glassy surface are a few char fishing-boats—black dots a long distance out. The church bells at Ambleside warn us that we have taken an hour to cover the eight miles from Coniston. A goodly portion of the forward route will now be along the road almost sacred to Wordsworth's 'Waggoner.' Under the trees to Rydal, where

> 'Towering from the sullen dark-brown mere,
> Like a black wall the mountain steeps appear.'

The country hereabouts is full of associations with that coterie of genius which so enriched our country's literature, and to whose efforts the popularity of the Land of the Lakes must be wholly attributed. At Rydal Mount the great Wordsworth lived and died; Coleridge lived at Nab Cottage; De Quincey was close by; while Arnold, Hemans, and Martineau all at one time lived in the district. Wordsworth's rock-seat is by the side of road and mere. Climb up it and see through the trees that grand view of Rydal Water. Wavelets are splashing, confusedly murmuring, against precipitous shore and rocky island, while across

the moonlit lake are the dark woods and bracken braes of Loughrigg.

The run to Grasmere is beautiful; then we skirt its eastern shore under the shadow of the mighty fells. Silver Howe towers splendidly across the water, and further to the north abuts, between deep glens, the steep front of Helm Crag. Over the village there still hang the wreaths of smoke from fires now dead. For a mile or two we pass up the darkened daleside, then emerge to commence the climb of Dunmail Raise. The rattle and bubble of mountain-streams come more and more distinctly to us as we rise, and now and again the straining chain or creaking tyre scares a wandering sheep. Now, before us, is a dark abyss, a pass between two mountain groups into which no straggling moonbeam can pierce, and away beyond it is a darker sheet—Thirlmere. The two miles' descent is rapidly accomplished, and, as to Wordsworth's jovial Waggoner, had the tiny church of Wythburn possessed a clock, as we approached it,

> 'Twelve strokes that clock would have been telling
> Under the brow of old Helvellyn.'

Everyone was abed at the hotel, but we found a corner in the stable-yard behind for our machines. They would be quite safe, as it is

only such wanderers as ourselves who reach this wayside spot during the hours of darkness. To our right, the dark-brown intakes rose, over-topped by an indefinite lofty ridge, above which, at a neck-tiring angle, was the deep azure sky. The air was quite chilly. Across the valley the moonlight showed clearly the deep ghylls and rock-clefts in Armboth; while beneath, at the ending of the shadow cast by Helvellyn and its kindred giants, a few bays of the lake shone in silver glory. The rest of the water, like a polished mirror, reflected the cold star-lit sky. But now above us a cloud was rolling along the uplands. In streams the vapour came from the west, and soon enshrouded the summit of the mountains. Shortly the moonlight came only through the narrow interstices among the clouds. We were determined to climb to the top, if such were possible; for scant accommodation would we get at this time of the morning. The path among the screes and bracken beds was hard to keep; but we soon passed to the crags, where every slab is scraped white by the passing of metal-shod climbers. Above the dark, rugged cliffs the way was very indistinct, and by now we had come into the damp, chilling mists—a fact which rendered our task more difficult. As we rose still higher, the light above began to increase.

The river of mist was not sufficiently deep to engulf the summit, and in a few minutes more we were leaving its moving folds behind. Above us was the long ridge and the cairn of Helvellyn. The moon shone out in the clear sky ; to right and left, at a great distance, were a few dark islets, the summits of the loftier mountains. Here and there rifts in the fluffy level gave glimpses down exquisite darkened dales, where dwindled woods and dwellings appeared as in the depth of a profound abyss. The breeze freshens from the west, and whirls the cloud about in reckless fashion ; an upward gust brings the moist veil over the shelter in which we are dodging the chilly current. For several minutes everything around is blotted out in a gray, shifting mask. We rejoice to see a brightening in the east, portending sunrise ; then, for exercise, climb some way down Striding Edge. Here there have been two fatalities : one of a huntsman who, dashing with his hounds along the narrow ridge, missed his footing, and fell a great way to his death ; the other was that of young Gough, and the tale of his terrier watching the dead body of the master who had wandered in a dense mist over the cliff-edge is one of Wordsworth's most pathetic stories of the fells. The steep climb warmed our blood wonderfully, and we returned

to the summit in time for the approaching sunrise. We watched the wonderful development of colour, then saw the glorious rim break out in the east. Instantly every billow of mist was brightened into a very rainbow, then—'What's that?' said one. Behind us two long shadows of men stretched upon the moving clouds. Like a couple of schoolboys, we made antics over the stony ridge, laughing at the dull portrayals; we were right to be joyful, as few have the luck to see 'the spectre of the Brocken' on our own fells. As the morning became brighter we hoped for the mist to dissipate; but it did not, and in a short half-hour we made the plunge into the chilly cauldron of cloud to reach the roadway by Clark's Beck-side. The descent into the head of this stream required caution, for the screes were very treacherous.

Passing the old gold-mine, by working which a former schoolmaster of Wythburn added to his stipend, we were soon in view of Thirlmere. A fair path from the lead-mines—disused for many a year—brought us to the coach-road, and in another twenty minutes we were on our machines. By retracing half a mile or so, we reached the new road to Keswick, built by the Manchester Corporation when Thirlmere was converted into a mighty reservoir, and now pottered along. It

was barely 5 a.m., and we had only ten miles to go, and if we got to the town earlier, we would have to wait till 7.30 for our breakfast. Therefore we passed a good half-hour observing the wild ducks feeding in a bay near Armboth, and another twenty minutes in pronouncing judgment on the colossal bank at the foot of the lake. There is a grand view from this point up the water; 'the dark brow of mighty Helvellyn'—now capriciously clear of mist—occupied one side; then came the gap of Dunmail Raise which we had crossed at midnight, and ridge after ridge of rocky eminences. The stone cairn on the nearest of these was built seven times in one summer by schoolboys, who seem to have been diligent in their aim to raise a memorial, but each time a strong wind blew it over.

Our ride into Keswick was splendid; a few mist-clouds chased about the mountain-tops, but deep in the valley the sun shone brightly, and everything looked fresh and green. Our pauses for new views were so many and took so much time that it was eight o'clock when we rode into the market-square at Keswick.

CHAPTER VIII

OVER SANDS

From the summit of Coniston Old Man or other of the Lake-District mountains, you look southward, if the air be clear, over wooded hills and cultivated valleys to the Irish Sea. The chief points in the visible coast-line are Morecambe Bay and the estuaries of the Kent, Leven, and Duddon. Our paper deals with the ancient method of crossing these streams at their mouths—by the sands.

To those who do not know the configuration of this part of England, a little explanation may be acceptable. That peculiar detached piece of Lancashire, Furness, is in shape not unlike two unequal tongues, the bases of which abut the neighbouring county of Westmorland. The southernmost tongue is divided from Lancashire by the Kent and from its sister fragment by the Leven, and this larger piece is bounded by the narrow Duddon valley and estuary. None of these rivers exceed forty miles in length, but are subject to rapid floods. Off the

coast the tide recedes to a great distance, leaving the sandy estuaries entirely dry between tides, except for the river-courses. The crossing of these sands from the south is commenced at Hest Bank, three miles north of Lancashire, when first the Keer and then the Kent is crossed to near Grange. From this village a good turnpike road runs through the Cartmel villages to Flookburgh, near which commence the Ulverston, or Leven, sands.

The actual fords by which the crossing is made vary in position, owing to the movement of the sands. In estuaries such as these the river at low tide creeps down to the sea by a shallow channel, but as the tide flows, the 'fresh' is gradually neutralized, and the sea-water in its advance silts up sufficient sand to turn the old channel into a level, submerged plain. At ebb the land-water regains its mastery, and, its power being at first focussed between comparatively narrow banks, it exerts an enormous grinding force, carving out a new channel in the sands. As the ebb becomes more pronounced and the centre of resistance gradually leaves the shore, the inland waters will spread out fanwise into a wide, shallow stream ere they join the sea. It is to find out these shallow points that a guide is employed. Any accident of wind or current may make a vast difference in their position; an almost imperceptible eddy of

the tide is likely to delve out large quantities of semi-liquid sand, leaving a hole a score of feet deep where a few hours previously there was but a few inches of water. Of course, though the shiftiness of the bed is proverbial, the variation *across* the estuary is usually but a few feet daily, though an extra heavy tide or a fierce gale may cause it to veer considerably, and every spring a greater or less movement is noticeable.

This variation in the course of years is considerable, as may be gleaned from old records. Gray, in 1769, mentions the route as the seven-mile sands, that being the distance from bank to bank; whereas Baines, in 1834, says: 'The guide said they were at present eleven miles over from Kent's Bank to Hest Bank, but that he had known them when he could pass directly over in not more than seven miles.'

To save himself the trouble of taking people from one bank right to the other, the guide plants a line of birch-twigs from the shore to near the channel, where he posts himself. These small bunches do not catch enough sand to bury them, and are therefore preferred to more substantial erections. The difference in level between the channel and the shore is really a trifling twenty feet at most, yet when you are crossing the idea forces itself upon you that you are descending into

a great depth, and the neighbouring shores seem to rise higher as they become more distant.

Time to cross sands, either at Kent, Leven, or Duddon, begins five hours after high water, and continues until about two and a half hours of the succeeding high water—*i.e.*, after the turn of the tide. This is at springtide, when, under normal conditions, the water advances and recedes to its utmost limit. If a strong wind be blowing from the sea, the tide may rise an hour earlier than usual, and, the same force retarding it, the ebb is equally slow, deducting two hours or so from the short time available. In stormy weather, or after heavy rain, the route cannot be crossed under any circumstances whatever.

The ideal ford is a place where vehicles can descend safely into the river-water, which will there be at no great depth. Sand logic proves that the fresh-water stream should always be some feet below the level of the sand, and therefore caution must be observed, lest a too abrupt descent overturns the coach, cart, or gig. The channel chosen should be fairly wide too; if narrow, there is a grievous danger of the water being too deep, and the bank undermined. In this case, on the near approach of any vehicle, the sand would give way, and the whole concern might be hurled down into the deep pool.

One of the chief dangers is that of quicksand. When a cart, or horse, or man is observed to have been accidentally trapped in one of these, there has to be an immediate rush to give assistance. As the quicksand may be of considerable extent, and the object of rescue nearly in the middle of it, the matter is always a grave one. On approaching the, let us say, bemired horse, the surface is carefully probed, so that, at least, the rescuer may be in safety. If the sand resists the descent of a stick, it is quite safe to go further. Soon, however, a point is reached at which the sound ground ceases, and then straw or planks have to be laid down to secure a firm footing. Of the minor accidents to coaches and other vehicles, some had a rather peculiar origin, if the traditions of natives and guides err not. During the period when the rising importance of Furness made crossings most frequent, salt was brought to Grange and Milnthorpe in fairly large schooners. As approach could only be made to their discharging points at high water, these boats had often to lie out in the estuary between tides. Coming up with the flood, as the water receded they were anchored, and gradually settled down on to the sandbanks until next tide. These banks being still under water, and quite doughy in texture, the keels usually delved out quite deep holes. As the water rose

again, the salt-boats were gradually moved forwards and backwards to one side or the other by recurring waves, and the sandy keel-rest was scooped into a large hole before the depth of water caused the craft to swing easily at anchor. As soon as possible, the boats were, of course, taken away to the landing-places to discharge cargo. It is seldom during the flow that considerable quantities of sand are deposited; the hole, therefore, in which the boat had lain—five feet deep, ten wide, and forty to sixty long—would not be filled until the ebb, when tons of material were dumped, so to speak, into it, with the result that at the bottom of the cavity the water could not escape, and a loose quicksand was formed. For a tide or two, till enough sand was deposited on its surface to expel the buried water, this was a dangerous place to the crossing. As there was no untoward sign on the surface, the guide had to carefully note the position of every boat near the line of his ford. Neglect of this precaution on the Leven sands in 1846 cost nine young people, men and women, their lives. They were returning to the Cartmel side, to which they belonged, from the Whitsuntide fair at Ulverston. Just beyond the ledge of rocks called Black Scar, they drove the cart in which they were riding into an apparently small piece of water. This was one of the dreaded

'hull-scoops,' and immediately its edge was reached, horse, cart, and passengers were upset, every one being drowned without their plight being perceived by the many other persons who were crossing at the same time, and who did not even hear a cry. They were all buried on June 4, 1846, at Cartmel, as the register shows, and their ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-five. Probably on another occasion, eleven years later, the same kind of mishap occurred. Seven young men, farm-servants, set off in a cart to cross the Kent Sands to Lancaster to attend the hiring fair of the next day. They started from Kent's Bank, and the following day their bodies were found washed about on the sands.

When the consistency is remembered—say, from stiff dough on the surface to nearly liquid at three feet—the risk will be apparent. Once in a quicksand, as in a bog, you are in a perilous state. The loosened sand allows you to sink slowly down (the locals say it 'sucks,' but that is exaggeration), without a chance of solid footing; but if you are thrown in almost headlong, as these were, the chances of rescue, however prompt, are none too rosy.

The fords to Furness are mentioned first by Tacitus, who recorded Agricola's second campaign against the Western Brigantes, who at that period

lived between the estuaries. The historian was so impressed that he points out Agricola in person (from whom he had his information), at the head of his army, attempting the estuaries of Morecambe, 'the greatest and most dangerous of the five between the rivers Dee and Duddon.' It is quite clear from remains discovered in 1803 and at later periods that during their occupation of the north the Romans made a sound road joining the three crossings, which continued to be the only great road through Low Furness until the dissolution of monasteries altered the routes for trade. The Domesday Book contains the next positive description of this portion of England, but does not mention the fords, though the farms of Low Furness beyond are carefully and faithfully dealt with. In the nineteenth year of Edward II., the danger of Leven Sands must have become apparent, for, 'according to a petition from the Abbot of Furness, the number of sixteen at one time, and six more at another, were sacrificed in this way—*i.e.*, by being caught by the tide and drowned—and in order to eschew the great mortality of the people of Furness on passing the sands at ebb of tide, he prayed that he should have a view of frank-pledge and a coroner of his own, for everywhere it would be the salvation of one soul at least.' The worthy Abbot was faith-

ful to his entreaty in that he established on Chapel Island a small chapel, wherein the monks daily offered up prayer 'for the safety of the souls of such as crossed the sands with the morning tide.' The long years darkened into time, and the vested priest was exiled from his place; still the fords were used. No connected record of accidents or happenings are to hand for centuries, though Royalists and Roundheads must frequently have crossed the sands during the Civil War. On one occasion the rival factions met and fought a small but fierce engagement within measurable distance of the Furness shore. From that time till local histories and descriptions began to be written we hear little more of the dangers of the sands; but year in and year out convoys of vehicles and men would be guided across, and disasters would inevitably occur. In 1745 the hungry Scot looked over the brimming estuary, and longed for that rich land beyond. Thomas West, whose chief works on Furness were written before 1774, mentions the route as being of considerable utility. In 1795 Green says: 'Since Mr. West wrote his description, a daily coach has been started between Ulverston and Lancaster.'

Prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when constant use gave the sand-track the appearance of a road, the crossing to a solitary

wayfarer in thick weather was very dangerous. For the danger was not that of quicksand or flowing tide alone, but an absolute uncertainty where you were going, and the serious risk of lighting upon deep water or holes if the guide and ford were missed. A large proportion of the accidents which occurred—and even as recorded they amounted to a dire number—arose from travellers so losing their way. The following entries are from old Cartmel registers, and they are extremely eloquent in themselves, though the effect is heightened when it is recalled that similar records, if preserved, would be found in half a score other church archives :

'1576. Sept. 12. One young man buryed, which was drowned in the brodwater.

'1582. Aug. 1, was buryed a son of Leonard Rollinson, of Furness Fell, drowned at the Grainge, the 28th daye of July.

'1610. Feb. 4. John ffell, son of Augustine, of Birkbie, drowned on Conynsed Sands.

'1630. Aug. 10. Wm. Best, gent., drowned on Melthorp Sands [upper part of Kent Sands].'

Baines, in 1828, describes a crossing he made, and mentions two coaches on the way, the one he accompanied from Lancaster meeting the Ulverston coach just after leaving the sands. In the itinerary to his book, dated 1834, the same

writer, however, remarks: 'A coach formerly passed over the sands, between Lancaster and Ulverston, but the sands having become increasingly dangerous, it was discontinued.' Only to be resumed again, however, for a writer in *Leisure Hour*, 1858, gives an account of this as the most pleasant mode of reaching Windermere. The passage was made in 'a respectable-looking old coach, that had evidently had some rough journeys in its time.' By 1864 the final blow had been struck to the route by the opening of the Furness railway, for when Edwin Waugh penned his tribute the ford and its guides had ceased to be of importance. Journeys are still undertaken along the sands was recently proved by a melancholy accident. A farmer had occasion to go to a house some nine miles away by road, though not half that distance by the sands. He set out in his cart early in the afternoon, but missed his way in a dense sea-mist. A search party found his body, with that of his horse, in a pool left by the receding tide. He had wandered nearly two miles towards the incoming sea.

Even in the old-world district bordering these estuaries the sands guides have always been a distinct class. They were, in the earlier days, the paid servants of the nearest priory, Conishead or Cartmel, which had synodals and Peter's pence

allowed towards the maintenance of the post. At the dissolution of these monasteries the liability was undertaken by the Duchy of Lancaster, and the salary of twenty pounds per annum to the Kent guide, and half that amount to the custodian of the Keer passage, is paid by the Receiver-General. The name of the first guide to whom Henry VIII. gave the office by patent was 'one Thomas Tempest.'

Quoting from a paper by that famous antiquary, John Fell, Esq., of Ulverston, the present position is :

'The Leven guide has had, since 1820, a salary of £22 per annum paid from the revenues of the Duchy, in addition to a grant of three acres of land. The Ulverston and Lancaster Railway Act, 1851, provides that a sum of £20 shall be annually paid for the benefit of the Leven Sands guide. This sum was in compensation for the loss of fees from passengers and vehicles, and did not affect his salary from the Duchy ; for the guide seldom escorted any person over the channel without receiving a small pecuniary acknowledgment for his services. The Kent guide occupies the Cart-house and three closes of land adjoining, a small meadow near Allithwaite, ten acres of enclosed land recently allotted his plot, and a piece of turbary or peat bog (now exhausted and reclaimed)

near Meathop Bridge. In petitioning in 1715 for an increase of salary by £5, John Carter, then holding the post, gives a splendid sidelight on the responsibilities of his office. "That the petitioner is obliged for managing the same employ to keep two horses summer and winter, and being necessitated to attend the edy [eddy] four miles upon the sands twelve hours in every twenty-four hours, his horses thereby and by often passing the waters are starved with cold, and so often thrown into distempers that thereby and maintaining them he is put to a very great charge, and that the petitioner undergoes great hardships by his being exposed to the wet and cold upon the plain [bleak] sands; and being often wett, and he by seeking out new ffords every variation of the edy, and upon happening of ffogs and mists, is often put in danger of his life."'

Mr. Fell also appends this note, which brings our information regarding the post quite up to date:

'At an inquiry into the post held in 1873, the evidence tended to prove that the office could not be abolished, although the crossing of the sands had fallen into great disuse compared to former times, and there was a possibility of its continuous decrease. Provision, however, having been made for the public safety by ample endowments of the

office of guide, and persons occasionally availing themselves of the convenience of the route from shore to shore of Morecambe Bay, it was felt that considerable responsibility would be involved if cases of drowning occurred by the withdrawal of the guides; and it must not be overlooked that any serious accident to the viaducts of the railway might at any time compel the temporary resuscitation of his duties.'

The following sketch of the old guides and their duties is, we judge, most faithful:

'The guide [at the Keer] appeared to drive with caution, and in no place went further than a mile from land. We had a good deal of conversation, and I found him intelligent and communicative. His name is Thomas Wilkinson. He is a tall, athletic man, past the middle age, and bears marks of the rough weather he has been exposed to in discharging the duties of his post during the winter months. In stormy, and more especially in foggy weather, those duties must be arduous and anxious. It is his business to station himself at the place where the river Keer runs over the sands to the sea, which is about three miles from Hest Bank, and to show travellers where they may pass in safety. The bed of the river is liable to frequent changes, and a fresh rush of water, after rain, may in a very short time

convert a very fordable place into a quicksand. When we came to the river he waded over to ascertain the firmness of the bottom, the water being about knee-deep. Having escorted us a little further till we saw the guide for the Kent at a distance, and having pointed out the line we should keep, he left us to return to his former post. We gave him, as is usual, a few pence; for, though he is appointed by Government, his salary is only £10 a year, and he is, of course, chiefly dependent on what he receives from travellers. . . . When Wilkinson left us we rode on some two or three miles before we came to the channel of the Kent, and there we found a guide on horseback, who had just forded the river from the opposite side. The guide stationed here has long gone by the name of Carter, and it is difficult to say whether the office has been so called from the family in which it has long been vested, or the family have assumed their official title as a cognomen ; but it is certain that for many ages the duties of guide over the Lancaster Sands have been performed by a family named Carter, descending from father to son. The present possessor of the office is James Carter, who has lately succeeded his father. He told me that some persons said the office of guide had been in his family five hundred years, but he did not know

how anybody could tell that, and all he could say was that they had held it "for many grandfathers back, longer than anyone knew." The salary was only £10 a year till his father's time, when it was raised to £20; yet, I should suppose that the office is a rather productive one, as the family have accumulated some property.

'The Carter seems a cheerful and pleasant fellow. He wore a rough greatcoat and a pair of jack boots, and was mounted on a good horse, which appeared to have been up to the ribs in water. When we came to him he recommended us to wait till the arrival of the coach, which was nearly a mile distant, as the tide would then be gone further out. I asked if there had been any accidents in this place lately, to which he replied that some boys were drowned two years ago, having attempted to pass when the tide was up in defiance of warnings; but that, with that exception, there had not been any accidents for a considerable time. When the coach came up we took the water in procession and crossed two channels, in one of which the water was up to the horses' bellies. The coach passed over without the least difficulty, being drawn by fine, tall horses. Arrived at the other side the man of genealogy received our gratuities, and we rode on, keeping close to a line of rods which have been planted in the sands

to indicate the track, which have remained there for many months.'

A gentleman, crossing from Lancaster, once asked the guide if his predecessors were ever lost on the sands. 'I never knew any lost,' said the guide. 'There's one or two been drowned now and then, but they're generally found somewhere i' th' bed when th' tide goes out.' People living within measurable distance of the sands will tell you that those who get their living by 'following the sands' hardly ever die in their beds. They end their days on the sands, and even their horses and carts are generally lost there. 'I have helped,' says one veteran of Grange, 'to pull horses and coaches—ay, and guides, too—out of the sands. The channel is seldom two days together in the same place. You may make the chart one day, and before the ink is dry it will have shifted.' It is a strange fact that those who use the dangerous crossing most frequently are most afraid of it, and some time in their career have narrow escapes from the returning tide.

West, in a book published in 1784, says: 'Along with the proper guides, crossing of the sands in summer is thought a journey of little more danger than any other.' Not only was all vehicular and passenger traffic to and from Furness transmitted by the over-sands route, but a good

many head of cattle and horses were annually driven across to southern markets. It seems to us remarkable that people in those days preferred the sea passage, with its acknowledged dangers, to the more circuitous way by the head of the estuary. On further reflection, however, we see that to reach this point from many parts of Furness would involve the crossing of the Mosses, now an artificially drained and cultivated plain, but then most likely a dangerous and deep morass, in which lurked many dangers from cattle-lifters as well as from unsound ground. It therefore resolved into a gamble: to lose a portion certainly in crossing the Mosses, or to chance getting clear through by the sand-track, with the possibility of disaster at the channel.

The road through Crosthwaite to Newby Bridge was in so bad condition even so late as 1763 that George III. was petitioned to repair from the Crown funds. It, the users complained, 'is in a ruinous condition, and in several parts narrow and incommodious.' The petition stated that no funds for its maintenance were available 'by the present methods provided by law.' About forty years later the new turnpike was completed across the Mosses under Whitbarrow, and the facilities were thus improved.

In a passage such as this, but across the Solway,

the famous Cumbrian, George Moore, had an adventure worth narrating. He, still a youth, had been to Scotland to pay a cattle-dealer a large sum of money on behalf of his father, after which he proposed to return to Wigton by way of Gretna—*i.e.*, round the head of the Solway from Dumfries. The cattle-dealer, however, interposed. 'What do you say,' he asked, 'to help me to drive the cattle home?' 'Oh,' said George, 'I have no objection.' It was only a little addition to the adventure.

'The two remained together all day. They drove the cattle by unfrequented routes in the direction of Annan. At length they reached the shores of the Solway Firth. The proper route into England was by way of Gretna, though the road by that way was much longer. But the cattle-dealer declared his intention of driving his cattle across the Solway Sands. Here was an opportunity for George to give up his charge and return home by the ordinary road. But no; if the cattle-dealer would cross the sands he would cross. And so he remained to see the upshot of the story.

'The tide was then at low ebb. The waste of sand stretched as far as the eye could reach. It was gloaming by this time, and the line of English coast, about five miles distant, looked

like a fog-bank. Night came on. It was too dark to cross then ; they must wait till the moon rose. It was midnight before its glitter shone upon the placid bosom of the Firth. The cattle-dealer then rose, drew his beasts together, and drove them in upon the sands.

'They had proceeded but a short way when they observed that the tide had turned. They pushed the beasts on with as much speed as they could. The sands were becoming softer. They crossed numberless pools of water. Then they saw the sea-waves coming upon them. On, on ! It was too late. The waves, which sometimes rush up the Solway three feet abreast, were driving in amongst the cattle. They were carried off their feet, and took to swimming. The horses upon which George Moore and his companion were mounted also took to swimming. They found it difficult to keep the cattle together, one at one side and one at the other. Yet they pushed on as well as they could. It was a swim for life. The cattle became separated, and were seen in the moonlight swimming in all directions. At last the herd reached firmer ground, pushed on, and landed near Bowness. But many of the cattle had been swept away, and were never afterwards heard of.'

It would be difficult to imagine a more pleasant

journey than that of 'over sands' in fine weather and under bright skies. As the conveyance drives down the roadway over the shingles and enters upon the long stretch of wave-ribbed sands, the apparent danger of the undertaking is borne in upon you. Behind, the land seems to be rising to an enormous height; in front, a ribbon of moving water seems to be much lower even than the point on which you are. Blue water is restlessly moving beyond Peel Castle, as if anxious to be coming toward the shore again, and it is unpleasant to remember that the sand now being crushed beneath your carriage-wheels a few hours ago was overrun by a dozen feet of water, and, further, that in a few more hours it will inevitably be covered again. The meeting with your first guide is a sure antidote to forebodings of such a character. You cannot help, unless hysterical, having confidence in this quiet, weather-beaten man, who, in sunshine and in storm alike, has for years been gathering accurate knowledge of this risky route. Now you begin to lift your eyes from the shimmering sands which have proved death-traps to so many, and to take an interest in the scenery beyond the bay you are now crossing. At the head of the Kent estuary, which is now gradually opening to the right, there is a grand view of the Westmorland mountains. The Keer

has long been crossed. The carriage plunged down into the shallow, sluggish stream, and the horses with much labour drew it up the opposite bank. The Kent is approached, and this a deeper and much wider stream, requiring more caution and careful guiding. In old days it washed the bottom of the coaches, a jet, if the water was rough, occasionally dashing through the windows into the faces of the passengers inside. It was not uncommon then for a belated coach to be washed bodily away at imminent risk of life and limb. The whereabouts of one such was not discovered for many months after the accident, so completely was it buried in the sands. On another occasion a funeral was crossing the channel when the tide began to rise suddenly. In a few minutes there was nothing for the cortège to do but to leave the bier and to flee for their own lives.

Among the many narrow escapes mention must be made of Major Bigland, of Bigland Hall, who, when crossing alone from Lancaster in his gig on a dusky evening, missed the Cartmel promontory entirely, and found himself most fortunately landing safely near Conishead Priory. In 1821 a post-chaise was lost close to Hest Bank after being apparently placed by the guide in safety across the river Keer. The occupant of the chaise, the post-boy, and one of the horses were drowned.

In August, four years later, the Lancaster coach was blown over when in mid-channel. The passengers were all saved, but one of the horses was drowned. Seven years later the same coach suddenly sank in a quicksand. The passengers scrambled to sound land safely, though one who endeavoured to save his property had a narrow escape.

The wooded heights of Low Furness come nearer and nearer, the shingles are rattled over, the conveyance threads in and out among the sea-worn rocks, and then terra-firma is reached once more.

On a wild evening the crossing of the sands is a much more formidable affair, and calls for the utmost vigilance of the guide and the driver, and for much passive endurance on the part of the horses. To transport ourselves into some such scene at the early part of the century, when the passage was an everyday necessity: the moaning of the wind is mingled with the dismal booming of the sea; the water is tossing on the misty horizon, fretting itself into little white breakers. The mounted guide, who is to see the coach with its precious mails safely through, is riding restlessly to and fro, looking uneasily alternately at the restless tide and down the road for the belated coach. In twenty minutes more it will be too

late ; but the great conveyance rolls up before that time. It is customary to rest and refresh a short time at the house by the bank, but to-night the guide will not allow it, and the horses are driven forward. There are few passengers, and their lot is unenviable. Instinctively every eye follows the coach as it rolls down the sloping road on to the broad, trackless waste of sand. The sky is spread overhead like a gray, shifting tent, and across the bay a full, irregular, purplish tongue marks the opposite headland. The rising wind trumpets and hisses around. Here and there upon the desolate flats a pale glimmer of water denotes a shallow channel. A company of sea-gulls wheel low along the sands, showing white and shining against the dull background. Gradually the coach loses form and colour and is gathered into the mystery of the distance.

One of the most touching of the disasters which have happened on the sands is recorded by Mr. Gray, who passed through the Lake-Country in 1769. He had walked over from Lancaster, where he was staying, to the pretty village of Poulton (now Morecambe). 'An old fisherman mending his nets (while I inquired about the danger of passing those sands) told me, in his dialect, a moving story, how a brother of the trade—a cockler, as he styled him—driving a

little cart with his two daughters (women grown) in it, and his wife on horse-back following, set out one day to cross the seven-mile sands, as they had been frequently used to do (for nobody in the village knew them better than the old man did). When they were about half-way over a thick fog rose, and as they advanced they found the water much deeper than they expected. The old man was puzzled. He stopped, and said he would go a little way to find some mark he was acquainted with. They stayed awhile for him, but in vain. They called aloud, but no reply. At last the young women pressed their mother to think where they were and go on. She would not leave the place. She wandered about forlorn and amazed. She would not quit her horse and get into the cart with them. They determined, after much time wasted, to turn back, and gave themselves up to the guidance of their horses. The elder woman was soon washed off and perished. The girls clung close to their cart, and the horse, sometimes wading and sometimes swimming, brought them back to land alive, but senseless with terror and distress, and unable for many days to give an account of themselves. The bodies of their parents were found the next ebb, that of the father a very few paces distant from the spot where he had left them.'

The estuary of the Duddon is the great feature in a landscape not otherwise very noticeable. It is a landlocked arm of the sea, which, further north, would be called a loch or firth. It is not entirely dependent on its low shores for its individuality; the long, level sandbanks have a character of their own both pleasant and unpleasant. From one shore to the other there is the inevitable over-sands route, this time about a mile and a half in length from the town of Askam to that of Millom. At the time when the track was last frequently used, there were only tiny villages, inhabited for the most part by fishermen and farmers. The channel in which the water at low tide makes its way to the sea is usually only some two hundred yards wide, and does not present as great difficulties as the crossings of the Kent and Leven already mentioned. Yet here, as at the other points mentioned, there is considerable danger, as two who one midnight attempted to cross without a guide found to their cost. The tide had clearly turned, and was running in fast, troubling each pool of water as it advanced. The warning had been cast lightly aside, but now there was no chance but to go forward to where a blurred flare on the water evidenced the opposite village. Now the rain-drift dimmed this landmark too, and all that could be seen of their route was a

dismal stretch of sands, narrowing rapidly as the incoming tide threw up its sides a succession of foamy patches. Now there lay between them and the shore half a mile of quaking sand and swelling pools and, maybe, racing seas, the foremost waves of which ever threatened to throw them off their feet. Every moment their position became more precarious, and they called for help in vain. As yet the higher sandbank on which they stood was firm ; but the cordon of water was drawing closer and closer, and the men, now completely surrounded, had almost given themselves up for lost, when their cries were heard and a boat put out to their rescue. No sooner had the half-drowned men been got aboard than the sandbank which had saved them suddenly collapsed.

There has been from time immemorial a smaller over-sands route at Sandside, where the Kent estuary is about a mile across, on which the inhabitants of Storth are dependent for their supply of fuel from the Foulshaw Mosses. The last time I saw the peat-carts coming across was late on a summer afternoon. A thunderstorm was growling itself away over the distant mountains ; the inky black clouds contrasted weirdly with the pale limestone of Whitbarrow, whilst nearer at hand the sun gleamed on long sandbanks and rippling channels. The carts approached along the oppo-

site bank, then descended into the river-bed. Where water was met, the horses threw up a glittering shower at every step. The sand was very firm; no route was apparently sought for, as the tide was at farthest ebb, and the river almost dry after a prolonged drought. Under less favourable conditions precautions would have been taken.

But even at this short, shallow ford narrow escapes are recorded, and occasional fatalities. Some thirty-five years ago a man left the Foulshaw farms as soon as the ebb allowed, to bring a couple of cartloads of slate from the Arnside district. He had reckoned to be back at Sandside early enough to cross before the tide again rose, but when he reached the inn by the shore a gray strip of sea-water was already forcing its way up the river. Though he fully realized the danger, he determined to make an attempt, and whipped up his horses accordingly. At that time the two rivers were making their way to the sea by separate channels, one close to either bank. The Bela was negotiated without difficulty; then came a long stretch of sands to the Kent channel, which was backwatering in an alarming manner. There was now no retreat, so the man drove his horses into the choppy, broken water as rapidly as possible. Down they went into the groove of the channel, the water rising under the horses. Wave after

wave struck the convoy, but the heavily-laden carts were not easily overturned. Just as the centre was reached a mammoth breaker struck them, and the latter cart was overturned. At imminent peril to himself, the driver made his way through the surges, now almost as deep as his neck, to the unfortunate horse, which was rapidly suffocating. It was a matter for urgency to cut the harness, and the writhing horse did not make things easier. However, in a few seconds all was severed, and the horse struggled to its feet again. The other horse had walked on, and was now in safety. As the tide receded, the farm-hands came to look for the cart and its load. The former had been carried some two hundred yards upstream by the current. Of the slates, a few only were lying embedded in the sand; the remainder were never recovered.

CHAPTER IX

ANENT SHEEP-WASHING

For about three weeks there had been no rain ; the dale-head, where it was usually green and lush, rapidly assumed a burnt hue ; many of the lesser mountain-becks ran dry. During the hot days the sheep wandered about listlessly or lay panting in the shadow of the boulders, feeding as much as possible by night, and finding their food in the swampy places. After looking over the sheep in the home intake—in these days of wire divisions of common the fells farmer does not need to visit his furthest heaf daily—we returned to a very early breakfast. At this the shepherds received instructions to prepare a dam for the sheep-washing.

The point selected for this was some two miles from our farm, itself the highest and most primitive in a highly elevated dale. My companions told me, as we brushed through luxuriant bracken and parsley fern, of their recent destruction of the

'gurt gray fox,' which had caused much anxiety and loss during the lambing season.

Now we approached the sheep-folds—roughly-built walls so lichened and hung with fern and moss as to be scarcely distinguishable from the moraines around. There were two main folds and two smaller ones; among them they would cover about half an acre. My companions stated that these erections afforded sufficient space for the handling at one time of over six hundred sheep. To send us here forty-eight hours ahead was a very sensible precaution, so meagre was the volume of the streamlet. The shepherds at once began to clear a space among the loose shilloe that the dam might be re-erected. We had ascended into a 'boddem,' which at one time might have held a small but deep and romantically situated mountain tarn, but from which the water had long since worn a deep gully. We were in the shallowest part, where the rock-strata had nowhere been deeply pierced; at some places the stream ran level with the glen. My friends plied pick and spade busily, and had soon almost reached bed-rock. I was then called upon to collect sods while they built up a rough but strong barrier. Stones of all sizes were to their hand, and were rapidly and skilfully utilized. When I looked up from cutting a stiff piece of turf, the wall was

almost completed, and T. was placing the first sods to make the structure more nearly watertight. The turfs were rammed in as solidly as possible, and the water was backing up perceptibly when we turned our attention to the fields. The gates between the courts into which these are divided had to be lifted on to their hinges again, and the gaps in the wall built up. In about an hour we had finished, and returned to our usual day's work, leaving the stream to collect in volume.

Two days later we were away by daybreak to the heafs to bring down our flocks for washing. We had first turn in the water in consideration of having prepared the 'dub,' and our flockmaster was desirous that we should get out of the way of the other farmers using the water. The sun was lighting up the braes above when we got to the pass-head after a long tramp over the rugged, loose track. In shape not unlike an irregular, five-pointed star, our heafs lay in front ; to right and to left a great grassy, stone-strewn waste, over which our flock of two thousand sheep were scattered. It was arranged that I should collect the sheep from the ground in front, and accordingly I made forward with the two dogs. These knew their work, so well had they been trained, that my part of the work was honorary, for they quartered the ground thoroughly, bolting out from

ghylls and unseen folds in the moor scores of sheep and lambs. Only once did a break away succeed, and that was close to where I stood. I now occasionally heard the distant whistling of the other shepherds, and in a few minutes gray Benny, the gamest dog in our dale, was in view behind. As we were driving towards a common centre, this showed that I was ahead of my position, hardly remarkable considering the great distances the others had to travel. The flock my dogs had collected was not in the open pass-head, and my erstwhile canines had, in obedience to some mysterious whistled signal, departed to assist the others. I looked back to see if any animals had evaded the patrol in my section, and was relieved to find that, look as I would, not a fleece could be seen. Up a bield right opposite, but over half a mile away, I could just discern three slowly moving dots. J. and his dogs had missed these among the rough boulders and bracken. When at last this shepherd came within easy ear-shot I triumphantly pointed them out. 'It's that ahld gray-faes'd yow' (ewe). 'Noo, Bob, awa',' was his reply, and the black-and-tan mixed breed dashed off. After running out of sight for three minutes or more, the dog was sighted making his way up the long, steep bield. He hesitated a moment, turned (I had the field-glasses on him),

then, as I heard my friend's arm semaphore a signal, Bob turned a little further to the right, diving out of sight in a bed of tall, waving fern. The shepherd spoke: 'Bob can't see 'em for t' bracken, but'—the distant fronds showed me that the dog was running at increased speed—'he's hard 'em.' I turned the glass on the objects for which Bob was aiming. They had ceased feeding, and were looking about nervously when Bob completed his turning movement. They ran down the steep hillside, and, though they repeatedly endeavoured to outspeed him, their pursuer never allowed them to get out of sight, and harried them mercilessly. As they were travelling towards us, I asked the shepherd why he did not employ the usual code of whistles to direct the dog, to which he replied that on the higher ground a stiff breeze was blowing, which would make the sounds uncertain. A dog could pick out hand-signals at an immense distance; 'two-a-three mile' in the dalesfolk's dialect represents an indefinite quantity. My comrades instanced that the heaf just collected from was one of the largest in the whole mountain area, yet one man with two dogs had more than once performed the same work correctly. In these evolutions the dogs must often have been over a mile from their master; occasionally the distance would be almost doubled.

Our flock was now massed near the gate into the pass, and the two shepherds had an amiable trial of skill as to how many fleeces we mustered, one saying 2,200, and the other fifty more. The correct number was almost midway between the two surmises. With the whole flock jogging down the stony road in front, we were soon in view of the basin where the sheep-washing was to be held. Already half a score men had collected round the fold, preparing for our coming. Through a gateway we rapidly placed the sheep into the intake, but to get them within the folds seemed a more difficult matter. However, with expert men and dogs around, the animals were handled easily, and in a few minutes both outer courts were filled, and the gates closed on the bleating, panic-stricken throng. I walked round the outside wall to the dam ; the water had collected to almost bank high, making a long pool. In this several men were standing, chest deep, waiting for the sheep to be thrown in. I climbed on to the wall of the inner court, where two burly men were standing. 'Noo, let yan cum.' The gate was opened, and a bewildered ewe pushed through the gap from the outer court. 'Cop it' (catch it), and the animal was lifted up and thrown into the pool, where it landed with a resounding splash. The sheep came to

the surface quite close to the washers, one of whom seized it, and, with a dexterous movement, turned it on to its back. Then he passed first right arm, then left, along the sheep's lower wool, turning it back and allowing the water to penetrate deeply into the fleece. In a minute or so the sheep was turned on to its breast, and the wool on its back allowed to saturate completely in the same manner as that of the under-parts. This done, the washer released the sheep, turning its head so that it might swim into clearer water up the pool.

I had watched these proceedings for awhile with great interest before I noticed that the volume of bleatings had increased—that it was coming from the distance as well as from near at hand. Looking around I espied a large flock of sheep moving down a rough slack in the next intake; it was the second flock. It is not infrequent that the farmers holding adjacent heafs thus combine to do their 'washing.' One preparation of dam and fold suffices, while the greater number of hands makes the work correspondingly lighter.

The work went on; when one set of shepherds were exhausted from lifting about the sheep, either in the water or on the land, another relay took their place. At one time I beheld a striking

scene. In six different intakes were huge blocks of sheep, each kept from straying by the ever-vigilant dogs and men. The true shepherd of the northern fells is a craftsman of a high order, and the manner in which they checked the more restless of their charges was to be wondered at. For the time being, the dale-head, usually so silent, was given over to an animated throng of men and dogs and sheep; the curlew and the raven wailed and croaked unheard in the babel chorus from the folds. At noon five flocks out of the six had been washed, and J. and T. had returned from driving our sheep to their heaf. We stopped a few minutes that all might partake of dinner; then with a will the work was resumed, and the last flock driven through the water in short of seventy minutes.

After the sheep had been returned to their various pasturages, the day was to be given over to sports, as is the custom. I did not join in or witness these, but sat awhile by the turgid washing-dub. The silence of the eternal mountains, banished by the busy scene of the morning, was slowly and solemnly resuming its reign. The creaking of the cart and an occasional voice from the retreating shepherds at first broke the quietness; but these interruptions gradually became fewer, then ceased. The white-gray sheep could

be easily seen on the green braes, moving about with more energy than of late days. I went up to the heaf where the flock I had helped to handle were dispersing in search of food, then returned to the farm.

CHAPTER X

IN CAMP ON CONISTON

ARRIVING at Coniston two days before the others, I had to prepare camp for their reception. At the landing-stage I found the boat friends had placed at our disposal, and got the heavy load of canvas, ropes, poles, and other equipment on board. Before long I had pulled the craft down to the tiny clearing under the steep woods, where our tent was to be raised. It was now mid-afternoon, and the sun was blazing hot. My first and hardest job was to unship cargo, then to seek out some convenient place for our boat to lie in safety. For some minutes I had been aware that an old farmer was flitting about the vicinity, though as yet he had not bestowed any remarks upon my operations. Selecting the mouth of a tiny beck for harbour, I hauled the boat thither, and prepared to drive a stout stake for mooring. The old man now rushed up in great alarm. 'Thoo maun't drive thee peg in the-ar, meh lad,

er thoo'll hae to pay for't.' I awaited explanations. It seemed that the lord of the manor claims a small impost on every stake driven into the lake-bed, which submerged area is his property.

My veteran friend visited me again just before seven o'clock, bringing unasked a most welcome supply of milk. He asked if my tent would be fit for habitation that evening, coupling the inquiry with an offer of quarters at his homestead. The only thing I wanted was a supply of sticks for my fire, and of these he sent me a cartload within an hour. While my kettle was boiling for supper, I had time to look around me. The sun had just set ; from behind the rugged heights to westward a rosy light still streamed into the cloudless sky, reflected in all its vividness in the waters at my feet. As the minutes passed, a faint breeze came from the distant sea, rippling the lake into gleaming wavelets. In the woods clothing the steeps, in the ash-lined ghylls, and on the gorse-yellowed braes above and beyond, the birds were singing their evening lays—thrush, linnet, lark, and a score of minor musicians vying in song. As the glow faded in the west, night, first clothing the valleys in violet and purple, then in darkening blue, spread slowly, regretfully, from the east. The faint current of air died

away, and a stillness crept through the coverts. The melodious tinkle of the becks down their rocky course came clearer to the ear than by day. The night-hawk shrieked above the moors, a wandering curlew or plover gave its plaintive call. For the past rich flood of music, from the brakes there now came twitterings from a thousand unseen throats, from the lake, the soft whistle of an otter or occasional plash as a trout fell back from its leap.

Supper over, I sought my bed, and, amid the pleasant odours of heath and bracken, fell asleep. The sighing of the dawn breeze among the ropes of my dwelling aroused me next morning. The air inside the tent was crisp, and I could hear the soft rumble of the breakers on the bouldery shore. After lighting my fire I rowed out, taking fishing-tackle with me. I did not care to go far, and was fortunate enough to get a couple of fair-sized trout close in, just on the boundary between deep and shallow water.

F. arrived about noon on the following day. While he inspected the outfit I busied myself with a few odd jobs. The field-oven was reported inefficient, the site of the camp preposterous. If there were the least rain, the beck would flood us out. The pole could hardly have been worse stepped—I reminded him of the fate of a similar

erection near Great End, which was carried by a moderate gale across the rough brae, leaving three white-robed figures exposed to the cold air of midnight.

After tea, F. pulled across to meet our third comrade. The wind had been gaining strength for some time past, and it took them all their time to get back safely. After supper, we discussed plans for the spending of our holiday. F. and L. were determined to ramble and scramble everywhere within reach, and to see as much as possible of the country-people and their pursuits.

At daybreak next morning my companions were eager to be off; their destination was Scafell Pike. I cooked breakfast, then ferried them to the most convenient landing. Returning to my canvas domicile, labours were light. A few buckets of water swilled the trodden grass into freshness. My ancient friend usually came up with milk and eggs about this time, and stayed for a chat on hunting or fishing. When he left, I went for a swim, then, maybe, retired to a hammock, surreptitiously hung in the leafy shadow of the copse. Here I slept or dawdled a few hours, then made my dinner, cleaned up, and again retired or went for a lazy ramble. At about five o'clock my real duties began. First of

all, I went out to fish, generally with scant success. The sun was hot, the sky and water clear, the trout and myself lethargic. After an hour of this, I drew in my line and returned to camp ; for a good supper had to be prepared for the two wanderers. This disposed of, we all went to bed. I may say that the above daily routine worked successfully, and was most enjoyable to me.

F. and L. returned from their Scafell trip in high spirits. Beginning with a steep gully in Great End, they had climbed down the whole range, negotiating several ugly precipices, concluding by crossing Eskdale to Hardknott Pass, and thus home. A dalesman of Butter Elkeld had noticed them watching the ravens sailing about the pikes and scaurs of that rugged area, and had offered, on the morrow, to lead them to the nesting-places. Both my comrades were very much excited at the prospect, and almost all night talked of victories over crag and slab, traverse and pitch. Ere they started off, I learnt that they might not return that evening, but promised to bring the boat across at ten o'clock to see. With me the day passed in the usual manner.

That night, though quite free from anxiety as to the safety of my absent friends, I could not sleep at all ; the night breeze stirring among

the ropes and through the woods sounded eerie, the soft lapping of the ripples disturbed me. Soon after midnight the confinement of the tent became unbearable, so I turned out. The moon was setting over the western ridges, but on the lake all was darkness. In the impenetrable gloom I could hardly keep my accustomed way to the beck in which our boat lay. I had brought out a light rod, and fished awhile with fair success. My habit of resting during the heat of the day made me particularly energetic, and I soon tired of an inactive pursuit. Then, why not go for a ramble? Where to? The meadows were soaking with dew, in the shelter of the copses all was hopeless tangle. But high up on the silent mountain-sides, high above the thin blue night mist spreading over lake and hollow, there was enough light to shape a rough, safe course through stones and scree. I looked at my watch —out here I could read its dial with ease—not yet half-past one! As I turned the boat's head, I decided to wander up the side of the Old Man.

No one was moving in the village, but seated on the first stile beyond was a tall young man, smoking. With the ease of wanderers, we compared our indefinite plans. Here was an individual as restless as myself, and quite agreeable to go

anywhere rather than indoors on such a lovely night. At about three a.m. we scrambled up the last scree, and came out on to the main. The sea of mountains may not be so tumbled and rocky as that viewed from Scafell Pike or Helvellyn, but here the gray old ocean is more prominent. The whole air now seemed to be impregnated with azure : bright spangled with stars above, gray on the mountain-side, deep unto violet in the narrow valleys. Soon after four the eastern light turned rosy, and the semi-transparent night-clouds hovering about caught the coming glory. The atmosphere was exceptionally clear ; every ghyll, every bield, every rock on the surrounding mountain-ranges could be seen ; every detail of wood and water was apparent in the valleys. Soon among the summits to northward the young rays gilded here and there a point, rendering even clearer its environment of gigantic rocks. Long ago the larks had commenced springing upwards from the bent and parsley fern, and the air resounded with their trillings. Stonechats whisked about the lichened outcrops, in and out of the loose gullies, pausing ever and anon to eye askance their early visitors. We watched the shadows, as the sun rose higher, creep down the hillsides and grow narrow across the lake. Was

it all imagination that brought to our ears a rising tide of bird-song from the brakes and woods so deep beneath?

My veteran friend was awaiting my return, being somewhat alarmed at finding the tent unoccupied and the boat missing. I cleaned camp and went through my usual routine, in the evening rowing across to see if any news could be had of my two friends. While I stayed chatting with an old boatman, they came down to the landing.

But I must hasten my narrative. One morning my old man came round with his boat—a heavy, old-fashioned craft — to take me eel-spearing. Armed with short tridents, we drifted noiselessly up to the fish, which were basking in the early sunshine. When within reach the stroke was made, not easy this from a moving boat. If the spear went straight the long, lithe body was impaled; otherwise the eel, with a curl suggestive of derision, sought refuge in the deeps. The sport was exciting, but only lasted two hours before the fish returned before the sun's heat. The locals have great faith in eelskin as a bandage for sprains, and to obtain a fresh supply our expedition was carried out.

Now, after days spent fishing by tarn and lake, in the rock dubs and peat pools of the mountain becks, after long rambles over bot and moor and

fell in search of the rarer birds and their nests, after visits to interesting local remains of Celt and Saxon, Briton and Roman, after sojourns by the fire of the charcoal-burners and in the sheds of the woodcutters, our holiday was drawn to a close. I was spared the duty of lowering the tent-pole and drawing the pegs, leaving Coniston in the pride of a summer morning.

CHAPTER XI

A SUMMER FOX-HUNT

THE fox is intensely hated by every fell-lander, not without reason, and summer and winter alike they plan its destruction.

When the vixen is confined to her summer retreat with cubs, the fox provides her with food, carrion generally, though varied with fresher fare from the sheep-folds and poultry-yards of the adjacent valleys. He also frequently establishes himself in some crag or moraine near at hand. The position of this refuge the shepherd notes, and at midnight you will hear him call together a collection of 'walking' hounds, collies and terriers, and, gavelock in hand, set off up the dale-head. Arrived at the earth an attack is usually delivered by the terriers, but sometimes the crowbar is resorted to at once. The huge blocks of stone are prised apart, and hurled thundering down the rugged, loose slope, till the occupier of the temporary earth has to bolt for very life. The crowd

of canines waiting around him give but little chance, though more than once Reynard has dashed through the mob unscathed and outpaced his followers in a race across the open fell.

A few weeks later the shepherd, when going at daybreak to 'look' his sheep, sees the young cubs playing outside their home. The playful cub of summer is the destructive fox of winter and lambing-time, so the shepherd plans destruction without compunction. At dawn he stealthily makes his way up a rocky field to the fox crag. Under his coat he is carrying a terrier, one bred with a keen lust for blood. When the early sun streams over the mountain region the cubs come out, as is their wont, and the vixen lies by the opening to her cavern watching their gambols. No taint of man or dog is upon the breeze, and in this sterile solitude she feels secure. The shepherd, taking advantage of all cover, has now crawled close up, and is hidden in a deep, waving bed of bracken. At the right moment, when the cubs have rolled and tumbled some distance from their cavern home, he releases the terrier, to whose keen scent the proximity of the foxes has long been apparent. With sharp barks it rushes upon its prey, and the peaceful, playful scene is at once turned into confusion. Recognising their hereditary enemy the cubs dash, squealing with fear,

towards their mother, but one or two, mayhap, are caught and slaughtered as they do so. The vixen, maternal instinct strong in her, dashes out to meet the danger and save her family from their foe. Sometimes by furiously attacking the terrier she diverts his attention, and succeeds in gaining for her cubs a moment or two's respite, in which to get out of harm's way ; occasionally she is slain in the fight which ensues round the mouth of the earth. In the open the terrier is a terror to the fox kind, but when, athirst for blood, it penetrates the gloomy galleries of the earth, the odds are against it, and many a too bold terrier has never returned from a conflict with the foxes in their home.

In spring the foxes batten for weeks on the dead carcasses which, after every winter and lambing-time, bestrew the uplands, and when these are consumed goes further afield, his depredations among the poultry and game of the dales and moors being little less serious than in winter.

Day after day the shepherds at dawning saw the 'gurt gray fox' stealing home to the long, splintered scaur - rampart bounding the dale ; sometimes he came across the boggy peat tracts from the forest, at others he slinked through the game-coverts on the opposite side of the valley. The shepherds feared him ; in its lust or hunger,

more than one late-born, weakly lamb had been attacked and slain on the lonely mountains. The fell-landers began to take their ancient muzzle-loaders (many relics of many grandfathers) with them to their work on sheep-walk and peat-pot; at gray dawn and at dusk they lay in wait under cover of the big boulders. But, though cruel, old Cæsar was cautious and crafty, and neither man nor dog contrived to get within reach of him.

The whole dale, from High Folds to Bottom-o'-t'-Dale, was soon in a seethe against the miscreant, and as a final resort a hunt was arranged. Not a short rush across brake and meadow, in which horse rather than man is distinguished and the fox frequently escapes with honour; but a reckless chase afoot across boulder and brae, bog and bracken, heather, ghyll, crag, and scree, with a deliberate, bloody purpose in view, hunting on relentlessly from dawn to dark, and from dark to dawn. Given a proof of Reynard's presence, and terrier, hound, and man will drive in wild, hot career along the steepest precipice, across the roughest crag-bed. They will scramble about on almost imperceptible ledges at dizzy heights, or storm the deepest, rockiest earth. Such is the hunting of the fell-landers.

It was still quite dark when we turned out; the

sky above was of that intense night-blue, through which the light of the innumerable stars shows so sharply.

From every farm as we passed up one or more men issued, till at High Folds we were some thirty strong, with an attendance of over fifty dogs of sorts. A hard-faced, grizzle-bearded man took charge, and gave the word to be getting along. 'It's cummen leet, lads, and we mun be up on t' scree-beds on ader (either) side o' t' dael afore t' sun rises.' Accordingly, the hunt divided and struck across the intakes. A rugged series of tors (or knotts, as they call them) stood out against the skyline, and it was on the comparative level beyond this that we hoped to meet Reynard and retaliate on his misdeeds. The pack moved very quietly now; the terse command to 'bide whyet' (quiet) was thoroughly obeyed by the collies, while the few hound-members were already in their usual silence before the work begins. A gray-blue arch was rising in the sky over the eastern mountains, and as its limits reached them, star after star paled from view before this progenitor of day. But this was no time to ponder on the extended view of barren, rocky waste so clearly revealed by the dawnlight; already scouts were being posted to survey the approaches to the mountain-side on which we were perched, and to signal Reynard's

coming. On Grey Craig we could see our other hunt moving—in the cover of the bields men and dogs in groups, on the exposed shoulders solitary figures among the moraines. The sun's rays were just tingeing the eastern clouds with red, when a scout far down the slope signalled an approach. Old Cæsar was coming along at a 'rare bat,' and if he did not discover their presence and alter his course, the pack might have a chance at pulling him down in a straight burst. Accordingly, we waited as quietly as possible, and saw the fox, at a long, swinging gallop, cross the slope some four hundred yards away. A terrier perched on a stone near its master sang out. A yelling stream of collies, hounds, terriers, and 'bob-tails' whisked around and past me, disappearing in an unevenness as though swallowed up. It was a hunt by 'view,' and Reynard, luckily for himself, realized this on the moment. A collie or a hound, when so minded, can get over rough ground rapidly, but they are not to be compared with a fox galloping for a longer lease of life. We poor humans were hopelessly outpaced.

All night in the faint breeze from the western ocean there had drifted long lines of thin cloud, and just at this juncture the mountain-tops were smothered with a dark-gray mask. We saw our scratch pack strain upward as the head of the dale

was approached, and enter the wrack, going strongly in the direction of the cliffs. The old fox had an unfindable hole somewhere there. Thrice had he been chased, and each time had the clouds fallen over the hillsides and allowed him to escape. The shepherds were not to be put off this time, so we scrambled up a steep, loose ghyll to the summit of the ridge. The cloud now slowly drifted away, and a wide, dreary expanse of damp grass and crag was laid bare. We saw our pack scrambling among the rocks and scree in a vain search for some trace of their pursuit. The grizzled *chargé d'affaires* was among the first to the spot; we saw him rapidly stalking over the pavement of irregular stones and boulders a long way ahead. By the time we reached the array of nondescripts, he had disappeared. Far down the breakneck descent we viewed him standing, terrier in hand, on the sheer edge of the cliff. He was apparently puzzled, and called for two men, acknowledged keen and knowing on all fox-matters, to come down to him.

A group soon scrambled down to his position, and eagerly discussed the situation. The terrier spoke to the trail down the loose stones along the splintered combe of the cliff and among the narrow broken ledges, but at the point where the bare rock fell away into the abyss the little animal

could give us no indication of whither Reynard had gone. On the very brink he dashed about madly, seeking a place for descent. But on the sheer rock beneath there seemed neither crevice nor cornice where even a fox could find foothold. Reynard's last move had baffled us completely for the present. A new plan of attack was evolved. Dividing into two parties, one taking the summit, the other the base of the crag, a patrol was begun. I thought this hopeless, but the more experienced did not. 'If the fox has found a hole or a recess in the cliff, he will remain hid from our view.' This was replied to by 'a straight crag has no holes, save at the top and in the ghyll-sides.' Men scrambled into every conceivable part of the huge rock : up and down perilous inclines, in and out of chimney-steep gullies, but nothing foxy was observed. In due time the point was reached where our hunt had concluded so abruptly.

There was much cogitation here ; then, seeing a small projection, perhaps three inches wide, at the foot of the long, abrupt shelf, I proposed that I be lowered so far. I could not slide down safely; in the descent so much momentum would be gained that the narrow ledge would be overshot, and there would only be the chance of a precarious hand-grip to prevent my being hurled a score fathoms down the crag. A rope was hastily

improvised, and I was slowly let down to the nearest point. I felt my toes touch the narrow ledge, then, pressing my body closely against the rock-wall, with both arms extended and fingers feeling for the slightest protrusion or crevice affording hold, I shuffled along sidewise a good way. For the first minute I knew, rather than saw, that my friends were in sight, then the sound of their voices were interrupted by an overhanging piece of rock. The ledge grew wider, and here I rested from my uncomfortable position. There was just room to turn if great care were taken, without losing balance and toppling over the cliff. I glanced around; bare stretches of crag were above, below, and on either side. The ledge which had brought me thus far disappeared from view at a sharp rock edge, which formed a difficult corner. The object of my search, the fox, was not in view, nor did I see any indications of his presence. My forward progress was slow; at every yard the ledge fell and separated me further from my companions. Now and again I heard them calling, and replied that I was all right. The narrow ledge disappeared completely at the jutting crag. Further advance seemed thus barred, but, as I did not relish a return along the perilous ledge, I examined the rock closely for foot and hand hold. The ridge 'was quite narrow, and

there was a possibility that the ledge would continue beyond it. With luck and good handhold there seemed a chance that I could squirm round the naze safely. A protrusion was within reach of my hand, and, trusting to this, I carefully put my foot round the corner, and, astride the jagged rock, tried to find something sound to stand upon. For a few seconds nothing came to my boot, then, striding further (at great risk of losing balance), I hit upon something which stood the test. Now, sliding my hands along, I gradually worked round the corner, and found myself, after a terribly anxious minute's work, perched beside a big crack which scored the cliff from near the summit to the base. The rock around was running with moisture and so much splintered that each move was only made after careful testing of holds, both above and below. My attention was now turned to the whereabouts of the fox, for with his light, lithe body he could easily get through every position I had passed. My hopes were promptly met, for, looking down in front, I saw him on a ledge, exposed fully to my view, though hidden from the searchers both at the cliff's summit and base. He had not noticed my approach, for he was intently watching my friends scrambling in the screes beneath. A loosened piece of rock sent thundering down the precipice drew their atten-

tion, and I at once signalled the whereabouts of the creature. This once found, the fox's destruction was easily carried out. One of the party with a gun climbed up the gully in which I was standing. At the shot the fox fell forward sorely wounded, and in its struggles toppled off the ledge. We picked up the carcass three hundred feet below, crushed by the fall almost out of recognition as an animal's body.

CHAPTER XII

AT EVENTIDE

Midnight, mid-day, sunrise, each have their peculiar charms for the cyclist among the fells. But during the hours of darkness you pedal and coast mile after mile through silent, lonesome countrysides ; at mid-day the sun is oftentimes so overpowering that energetic work is out of the question, while at daybreak you do not feel fully awake, and the dawn breezes are, oh ! so cold. The dale is still asleep, the mountains are chilly and gray, even the little fell-sheep are drowsy in their movements. At eventide, however, there is no drawback to the pleasures of the wheel. The breeze which sprang up as the sun declined, freed the air of clogging heat and dust, and refreshed all nature.

As a blazing afternoon waned into a lovely evening, we were quietly riding in the direction of Ullswater up the narrowing vale. We had left Penrith by the main road, and at Eamont Bridge

had turned westward through one of Sir Walter Scott's favourite districts. Around King Arthur's Round Table and

> 'Mayborough's mound and stones of power,
> By Druids raised in magic hour,'

he has woven the most fanciful threads of 'The Bridal of Triermain.' Eden Hall was next passed, where, in a niche of the banqueting hall, is chained for safety the mystic cup captured in days lang syne from the fairies.

> 'If this cup e'er break or fall,
> Farewell good luck to Eden Hall.'

Here we climb a long ascent, there coast down between sweet-scented hedgerows, hung with wild roses, entwined with honeysuckle. At the highest points the roadside is overgrown with dense fern and bracken ; in the hollows the wild canterbury-bell and foxglove lord it among wild geranium and a hundred other flowering plants. Here is Tirrel, and in the burial-ground attached to the abandoned-looking meeting-house, in the sound of the bee-haunted sycamores, lies the body of Charles Gough, to whose tragic death thereon is due much of the ill-repute of that fine rock-approach to Helvellyn, Striding Edge.

At the summit of a long hill, with a precipitous

descent, we dismounted. In the twinkling of an eye, it seemed,

'Ulfo's lake beneath us lay!'

In front the water, gleaming in the sunlight, fills the hollow from side to side, stretching away beyond into dusky mountain recesses. We walked down the worst pitches of the hill, then rode through the hamlet. Across Pooley Bridge the road winds along the waterside embowered in woods of oak and fir, affording us many a glimpse across the tiny wavelets, tossing back the radiant hue of the sky, to the circle of silent mountains, in front of which purple night-shadows are beginning to collect, gradually absorbing in great colour-blots the rugged offshoots of Fairfield and of Helvellyn. Up and down hill we pedalled at a fair speed, and the wild front of Gowbarrow was reached. Here is Lyulph's Tower. The hillside beyond is scored with the deep gully whence comes the distant roar of Aira Force. At the head of the great rocks, between which the stream descends in two churning, crashing volumes, a knight and a lady were at one time wont to keep tryst. Their secret meetings were broken off by the soldier being called upon to join a Crusade. Time rolled on, and rumour said he was dead. The news so preyed upon the mind of the lady of Lyulph's

Tower that she began to walk in her sleep to the chasm. The knight, however, was alive. On his return, straightway he made his way at eventide to their wonted trysting-place. He was surprised to find the lady there before him, and still more surprised that she did not greet him. Stepping up to her side, he touched her. She started back, back over the brink by which she had been standing, falling five score feet into the raging pool at the foot of the fosse. The knight leapt down after her, and, after a tremendous struggle with the tossing waters, drew the light body to shore—too late, however, to save her life, as she expired almost immediately, with his name upon her lips. The knight eschewed his armour and took to a hermit's life, building a cell upon the beetling crag from which his lady had fallen to her death. Across the narrow fields the fishermen's nets were drying. Ullswater's finny tribute is not large now, nor much sought after. Time was when the dalesfolk combined forces to stretch their nets across the narrows of the lake, from the rocky shelves of Skelly Neb to the abrupt, wave-lapt foot of Geordie Crag, at the season when char and gwiniad migrated from one basin of the lake to another. At such times the 'take' was measured by the cartload.

For awhile the road carried us along the lake's

edge, only separated from its quietly moving waves by a small beach of pebbles and boulders, with here and there a brake of hawthorn, hazel, or alder. What a series of grand views of Place Fell we got as we wheeled along! In bands of bracken and heather, scree and boulder, it rises above the lake to a summit of rocks and crags tossed high in the sunlit skies. Soon we were at the mouth of the beautiful Glencoin Valley, crossing the county boundary at a tiny stream, from which an old historian avers that he took with rod and line 174 large trout in a day. We are now perceptibly nearer the mountains. The hills on our right push their fronts boldly towards the lake, leaving scarce room for the road to wind 'twixt water and rock. Now they rise higher, no longer masked by clinging fir and aspen, but in tall, bleak crags. At Stybarrow you glance at the huge upper crag, then walk a few steps more than the width of the road to look down upon the lake murmuring against the outermost slabs of the precipice. In the old days, before this mid-air passage was constructed, Stybarrow Crag barred the way of the moss-troopers to the peace of Patterdale. It was on the crest of this, during one crisis, that a dales-man collected a small force, and gained, out of a complete rout, a victory over pursuing Scots.

For this the Mounsey was made King of Patterdale by his comrades, granted the best house and the best lands, and pledged to lead the dalesmen against all future raiders.

After a short interval the road is again by the lake, and St. Patrick's Well is reached. Here, in his barefoot journey between the Holy and the Emerald Isles, the great saint was wont to rest and exhort the pagan dalesmen, afterwards baptizing such as desired. In gratitude and to his imperishable memory, the inhabitants gave his name to their valley, which in ancient ecclesiastical writ was always alluded to as Patricksdale. At Crookabeck we ran beside the Goldrill, the main feeder of Ullswater, which here takes a turn, almost a complete loop, and a few hundred yards further on emerged from the shadow of bracken-clothed hills, to ride in bright sunlight awhile. The sun was glancing his last over the scaur of Wrangdale Head, flooding this part of the dale with his dying glory. At the foot of Brothers' Water, where the dale is much narrower, we slackened pace to enjoy that splendid view across the tarn and right into the basin of mountains beyond. A few minutes later we began to work along the rugged spur coming down from the Kirk Stone. We have had a few glimpses up the pass. Against the glowing sky the boulder from

which its name is taken is quite prominent. We pass the tarn, where a couple of anglers are plying their art, and push on up slopes steadily becoming more difficult. About a mile further on is the loose surface associated with 'slipper'd' coaches, and here we dismount. All day there is a procession backwards and forwards, but now, when everything is at its finest, we are the only witnesses, and the call of a curlew alone rings through the silent hollow. Now and again the sheep, clambering among steep rocks, gushing becks, and loose scree, send forth a chorus of bleats; a lark falling through the sunlit air to its nest among the tumbled grass-tussocks trills that day is not yet quite gone, and that the sun with his last fond beams is gilding the mountain-tops on which he rose.

Higher, the ascent becomes laborious. From a crag far up Red Screes a couple of ravens issue, instantly making away with grand sweeps of their wings. Their hoarse croaks can be heard long after they have disappeared over the fells towards some mountain fastness about Mardale. The glen is fast narrowing. Fell-lichens are on every rock, and parsley ferns everywhere wave their dainty fronds in the almost imperceptible breeze. At a corner we laid our cycles by the roadside, and looked back into the

gulf from which we had ascended. Hemmed in by abrupt hills, some clothed with dense coppice, others showing no vegetation larger than the bracken or bent, Brothers' Water looked small indeed, and on its bosom we detected the boat. Those fishermen had chosen an agreeable evening indeed. Above, all is wildness and weirdness. The grass has given way to huge patches of naked, barren earth and expanses of dull red ironstone.

We start again. Above is a moraine of huge rocks, flung haphazard from the cliffs and gullies, and chiefest of these is the Kirk Stone. Around the corner the pass-head suddenly comes in sight, and we are soon pedalling along the almost level summit to the inn—claimed to be the highest inhabited house in England. Here we stand chatting a few minutes with the veteran sportsman who occupies this lonely dwelling. My companion asked what time it took to ascend the Screes from the inn. Oh, forty minutes was fair time. H. at once aspired to do the climb. In vain I pointed out that in the gathering gloom the ascent would become a blind grope over bracken and parsley fern, scree and boulder, crag and steep. In reply, H. asserted that if I was tired he could manage the feat alone. We were over the wall dividing road from fell in quick time, H. leading, but he landed sprawling among the damp

bent, being unaware of the hog-wire stretched along every fell-wall to prevent the sheep straying to other heafs. This did not quench my comrade's self-confidence. Anthony had pointed out the great rock rib by which the ascent is best made, and, in defiance of my warning, H. took a direct line for its nearest visible point. After a while I heard grunts and ejaculations afar to my left. He hailed in a very disgusted tone, and wanted to know the way to a drier path. He was not assured to hear that advance or retreat were now alike over equally spongy grounds.

At the top of the first rock-terrace I awaited my friend's coming. He had almost stuck fast in a sphagnum morass, had been knee-deep in mire, and had been fairly soaked by floundering into an unseen peat-pot. Above, the warm tints of the afterglow had gradually sunk out of the filmy clouds drifting in the faint night-currents. The slope became steeper, the route rougher. The path could barely be seen in the 'darkness below the summit,' but I managed to keep fairly to the direction. At last the long-expected went amiss with my calculations. Instead of reaching a fair-pitched grass bank, we were in a wilderness of jagged, storm-torn rocks, sheering up through slippery scree. I looked up. The irregularities on the skyline gave no clue as to how to get clear of

this. Down in the gray-blue abyss I could discern nothing definite but the distant, whitewashed inn. In a while I hit on a route which promised success : a narrow cleft in the rocks floored with the loosest of stones. Up this we scrambled, issuing by a steep piece of hand-over-hand rock climbing nearly at the top of the mountain.

At last our climb was over. All around us were tumbled gray-blue mountains, and beyond the inner belt of these showed the long, narrow stretches of Ullswater, Windermere, Esthwaite, and Coniston. The silence was wonderful: the breeze soughed through the grasses ; the beck fretted down its rocky course five hundred feet below ; occasional guttural half-bleats from the wandering sheep—these were all. We stood drinking in the surrounding loveliness till the cold racking our bones forced us to move again. The descent was very difficult. At the sharp angle prevailing a slip meant a nasty fall, and the utmost care had to be taken. However, we reached the inn safely through the darkness, and recovered our cycles.

As we walked down the steep descent toward Ambleside, through the night we heard a series of wild 'craiks.' There, almost out of sight, crossing the mountains, were three herons. In their lumbering flight they had winged from Ullswater, and were making for some congenial shallow of

Windermere or further Esthwaite. Now and again we heard ravens croaking from the crags, and buzzard-hawks skirling above the grassy wastes of Woundale Moss. At the foot of the first precipice we were able to ride a short way, then we walked the remaining slope. At Ambleside we reached a rideable though dusty road again. From Waterhead to Lowwood the steely lake is close beside. Afterwards we only get distant gleams of it through the trees or over the steaming meadows.

About half-past eleven we pedalled through the quiet streets to our lodging, prepared to assert finally that a ride among the fells at eventide brings before the cyclist scenes beautiful beyond comparison with those seen under any other circumstances.

CHAPTER XIII

MOUNTAIN BIRDS

THERE is a wild exhilaration to one who after many days returns to his one-time frequent rambles over the fells in the first note of a wild raven echoing from a storm-split ravine of Great End as he wends up the rugged path to Eskhause, or when he newly hears it as he sits by rock-bounded Red Tarn and surveys the huge crags of Helvellyn.

The day of our ramble had opened with fine rain, the hilltops were close-shrouded with mists, but the gathering power of sun and wind gave hopes of a fair journey. We had penetrated, by rough quarry-paths, into the scree-surrounded basin of Low Water before the first bird-sound distinctive of the fell-lands was heard. Cushats had cooed from the swaying pines of Church-beck Ghyll, throstles and blackbirds sang and whistled in the roadside brakes, and the dipper's joyous lilt had echoed through the water-worn gorges

'neath the Coniston falls ; but now, barely discernible against the cloud-stream surging over the head of the Old Man, a curlew was crossing the gulf in which we stood, giving its eerie whistle at short intervals. This bird, above all others, is a sign of the proximity of the fells. At all hours of night and day they are wailing over the upland farms.

The curlew draws sustenance from the morasses perched high on the mountain shoulders. Its long, slender bill is utilized to probe the wet sphagnum to as great a depth as worms and aquatic larvæ are likely to be found. Wandering ever, it is hardly remarkable that the love attaching to the bird should be sinister, and dalesmen of the ancient stock will tell you stories of perilous wanderings through the mist in fruitless search of a loudly crying human. After many hours, maybe after nightfall, the searcher comes close to his quest ; there would be a wild skirl, like the one followed at much labour, then a flapping of wings, as the curlew flew away. This usually occurred when the follower had been lured into a particularly dangerous position. The curlew's eggs are not easy to find. There is no semblance of a nest. Any irregularity of the grassy tract or stony upland beach will serve the purpose. The bird frequently occupies its nest till the intruder

is within ten yards. As it rises on the wing, do not let your eye follow its flight, as it is mechanically apt to do, but keep your attention fixed on the particular bunch of grass your bird has deserted. Even when you arrive at this point, the eggs, light-brown, blotched with a darker hue, are hard to discern as they lie together. There is one peculiarity in the coloration of a curlew's egg which we do not think has been often emphasized. The egg, wide at one end, comes almost to a point, which is always turned true toward the centre of the nest, and the weight seems so disposed that the point generally rests on the ground. The dark blotches mentioned are so frequent (in eggs taken from the uplands) at the point of the egg that little of the light colour can be seen, but further up the patches become less numerous and the natural brown of the shell more in evidence. The stones most frequent on tracts favoured as nesting-places by curlews present the same dis persions of colour, are generally more or less pointed, and gray to brown in hue. Small dark splashes, probably microscopic lichens, similar in contour to those on the shells, are on every stone, and their bewildering abundance makes the birds' eggs difficult to find.

As we walk down the hause toward Seathwaite Tarn two ravens are seen flying high above. Our

glasses follow their course as they sweep towards Dow Crag, and they are finally marked down in a crack of that tremendous rock. Here, probably, is their rough nest, perhaps containing two eggs, and, as the season is so far advanced, the young birds. A raven's nest is never a pleasing spectacle, and the smell of decomposing animal substances is sickening. Dow Crag was at one time a haunt of the great eagle, and stories of this long-vanished bird are to be found in ancient literature. The shepherds whose occupation lies on these fells have a great hatred of the raven, and no opportunity of destroying the kind is neglected. Bands of men visit every cliff at nesting-time and invade, by aid of long ropes, the steepest aretes in which the nests are found. An added incentive is that the eggs of the British raven obtain a fair price among tourists. The bird's food is chiefly carrion. Their footmarks are noticeable among the trampled snow beside every dead sheep within miles. The raven's power of scenting food at an immense distance is only equalled by its expedition in winging its way to the spot. Shepherds say that a raven soaring at such a height as to be invisible will descend accurately to the body of a dead lamb within a very few minutes of its abandonment. The haunts of this species in the Lake-Country are now entirely among the highest and

most remote ridges. Many years ago the last 'nesters' were shot in such outlying scaurs as Whitbarrow.

Far beneath to our right now comes into view Gates Water. Many anglers resort to this lonely shelf in the mountain-side, but at this moment no human wanders by the rocky marge. A distant 'craik' comes on the breeze. A heron is astir somewhere. In a minute or so we see two of these great birds come sweeping up the glen and settle down by the tarn-side. Herons do not usually nest by these high-level tarns, where the ground is too sterile and exposed for the growth of trees. Large numbers resort to the island in Devoke Water, but we do not recollect any other instance. There used to be a heronry on the largest islet in Rydalmere, but for thirty years past only fugitive families have occupied it. The place became too noisy, and the herons moved their nesting-place to a well-known cluster of trees by retired Esthwaite. In winter the herons of the mountains congregate at Dallam Tower, where the trees claimed for the heronry overlook the great estuary of Morecambe and the extensive mosses bordering it. During even the severest weather, with every tide numbers of small fish seek the shallows, and without this wholesale supply of food the great crowd of birds would be

forced to disperse. Quite close to the heronry is a well-tenanted rookery, and between the rival occupants exists armed peace. Should a gale uproot a tree belonging to either party, there is sure to be severe fighting. The herons whose home has been destroyed attempt during the mid-day absence to storm a rook-tree, and for some time may succeed in holding it. Gradually fresh battalions are called up upon either side, and the war becomes general. The slaughter is immense, and victory may be on either side; for while the herons are individually much more powerful than their opponents, the latter are able to recruit thousands from the surrounding districts. Legend, picturesque and local, says that during the brief period in 1815 when the British troops faced Napoleon's last great army, heavy fighting was in progress between rooks and herons at Dallam Tower. An unseasonable gale had levelled half the rookery, and, though it was the nesting season, the inevitable war of 'grab' ensued. For some days the rooks held the mastery against a depleted garrison of herons, seizing several trees, ruthlessly destroying their heroic defenders; then, after toppling out the eggs or young birds, they pulled the nests to pieces. Meanwhile, the 'fiery cross' of the herons had gone round, and from fell and tarn and moss

succour came. The moss-landers' legend says that for days the battle-cry of herons hastening to the fray was heard, while innumerable hosts of rooks assembled to defend their kindred. On June 18 the final engagement took place, and at eventide the victory lay with the herons, who successfully retook the trees. Thousands of rooks lay about the scene of strife with hundreds of their dark-gray conquerors. Slight resumptions of the war were made again and again, but on the day that the Allied Troops entered Paris the rooks dispersed beaten. From a naturalist's point of view the above account is fairly correct, but the much-insisted-upon coincidence of dates is—well, picturesque and local.

Our route now turns sharply to the right down a grassy slope. This is the sort of ground beloved by the dotterel. Years ago large flights of dotterel used to visit these fells. The bird is a migrant, reaching this country in autumn from the far North, and returning again in the spring. Some few couples annually stayed to breed among our mountains. The finding of a dotterel's nest is now a rare occurrence, and many of our most enthusiastic naturalists have never met with one. Some seven years ago we were walking across the fells away to the northward. The day was intolerably hot, and, espying a cool gush of water some

hundred yards down a ghyll, we made at once towards it. A couple of handsome birds of the plover type, wandering among the rocks, at our approach flew some short distance away, then settled again. The tiny spring we had descended to spouted up through a thick carpeting of that green, upgrowing moss so familiar to fell wanderers, and on the edge of this, in a slight depression, three eggs were deposited—light-brown, with a sort of greeny tinge, blotched over with dark-brown and black, in size rather less than those of the ordinary peewit's. The ground we were to cross was very rugged, so, being without a box to carry the eggs in, we left the nest intact. A few hours later, in speaking to a knot of dalesmen, we were surprised by their eager inquiry after the locale of our find. We had seen the nest and eggs of a dotterel.

To find a dotterel's nest, always keep to the highest ridges. The bird likes to be within the realm of the mist. The nest will be found within a bed of moss or behind any tuft of grass affording some concealment, usually near rocks or boulders. A friend of days gone by described on one occasion the surroundings of the last six dotterel nests he had seen, two of which were on slacks or grassy tongues far up the huge precipice of Pavey Ark, one within ten yards of a cairn on the Stake

Pass; the remaining three were in that bosky dip over which the rough face of Seat Sandal looks toward Helvellyn. There, I doubt not, at a height of over two thousand feet, will be found the last English nesting-place of the dotterel.

As we consider these things, the path has been gradually bringing us down the hillside into the glen of Seathwaite Tarn, the clear waters of which are now in view. For a mountain district the birds are numerous. Stonechats, in their uniforms of gray and white, whisk about the lichened boulders. There is the hoarse croak of a raven from somewhere beneath. As a kestrel whirrs, down from their busy flights fall the stonechats. From his aerial beat the bird of prey looks upon a hundred thousand patches of gray, and one or more of these is a stonechat; but the remarkable sameness of colour baffles him. Not so the sparrow-hawk, who approaches in dead silence the brace or so of small birds sporting by the bogs and boulders. He is upon them and has struck his victim before his presence is discovered. Others of the great hawk family range the fells, so that the life of a small bird is of uncertain tenure.

Now our path winds its way between huge boulders and across crag-beds, gradually descending the while. The scene can scarcely be equalled for ruggedness and desolation. To put bird-lore

aside for a moment, that first long ridge is Harter Fell, on which ranged wild till within the past century the native red mountain deer. And in that wide bog beyond Wallabarrow, showing in its rich chocolate hue what large quantities of peat are annually dug, from successive layers deer-horns are occasionally exhumed, near the surface antlers of the small native deer, in the depths the horns of the giant animals which occupied these wastes in prehistoric times. Seathwaite Tarn now reappears two hundred feet beneath. Char live in this water, which the lord of the manor in days gone by used to net. After the nets had drawn a finny tribute, fires were lit by the shore, and the silent mountains re-echoed the sound of merriment. On the rocky island near the outlet of the tarn a colony of seagulls breed annually, the only instance in the Lake Country of sea-birds nesting so far as six flight-miles from their native element.

Passing the tarn, our path strikes across a bouldery waste, descending into the dale-head by a zigzag path. A carrion crow flies up from a congenial feast. The scavenger of the fells is not an attractive bird from any point of view. Its nest is built at the top of some lonely pine, where the faded blue eggs are safe from the usual dangers. At the foot of the steep brow we

rejoin our streamlet, now swollen enormously in volume, which has foamed and leapt down a very direct course. About its bright waters several watercrows are flitting, most interesting birds to the rambler and to the close observer. This white-breasted bird of the waterside feeds on the gauzy-winged ephemera in their myriad processes of life. Sit a moment by this rock-pool and watch the dipper's evolutions. By a vibratory motion of the wings he drives himself from the mossy rock on which he settled a moment ago down through the water, and, by the aid of his widespreading feet, clings to and walks, though not without much effort, among the pebbles. These he rapidly turns over with his bill, searching for larvæ, some of whose hard cases must prove tough work for his little bill to demolish. He follows the brook carefully downwards, sometimes quite immersed, and again with the water barely touching his feet. The dipper is a merry bird, and his rollicking bursts of song cheer the wanderer when much-renowned songsters are in their winter silence.

The above brief, inadequate sketch tells of a few of our mountain birds. A whole book is required to do the subject justice.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER OTTER

Various classes of streams provide sport for the otter-hunter. In some countries the river-beds are smooth, and the water slides gently over pebble shallows from one deep, quiet pool to another as deep and still. The waterside is overhung with trees and bushes, among the matted roots of which is the otter's final halt. In other and more rugged districts every stream's course is dotted with huge rocks ; the winter floods allow neither tree nor bush to exist within many feet of the normal flow ; water-breaks and cascades are numerous. Every stream beloved of the otter-hunter has its own peculiarities, calling for special study.

On our stream the angler and the otter are intimate acquaintances—I cannot say friends, though some of us are not inveterate enemies. Many an evening have I strolled down to the great trough beneath the force to watch the fish lazily rising and falling in the clear water. After

this I await the outcoming of the otters; and rarely am I disappointed, for the colony is a fairly numerous one. The place is a wilderness of rocks; some smooth with the stream's constant laving, others gray and orange with lichens, some green with moss, broken, and affording niches for the dainty harebell or the wild marguerite. Near the cascade a solitary holly has cast anchor in the rifted rock.

In the gloaming the first sign that the otter has left his secret lair is a quaint soft whistle; it comes from among the rocks, quite near the water. Now there is another, this time from the other side of the stream. Still nothing is to be seen, and the signal may have been given a score times before the most vigilant eye locates a dark dot moving along the surface of the pool. In his evening excursions on our streams the otter takes great pains in scouting for danger. For half an hour he swims about, diving and doubling, appearing here, there, and reappearing there till you are almost persuaded that a hundred otters, hidden in the undercurrent, are rising at frequent intervals for breath. When thoroughly satisfied, the otter calls out his family and commences operations.

The big trout are now being harried in all directions by a swimmer almost their equal in speed. The otter rises and dives without making

the slightest splash or bubble. Once I hear a sharp splashing for a moment; one of the otters has made a capture, and is landing his victim not ten yards away. In the half-light we see the captor coolly taking a meal off the still struggling trout. After his hunger has been appeased the otter will become in a cruel fashion sportive; he will chase the trout and bite pieces out of them. Yesterday a fish minus half a tail came into our landing-net from this very pool; others taken at various times show bites on back, sides, and shoulders. This wanton mischief will come to an end soon, for our stream is not a large one, and the pack are already tracing it upwards from the sea.

* * * * *

The hounds were to commence the day's hunt some four miles away. We walked downstream to meet them. We were at the foot of a long, still pool when the first drag was struck. The pack seemed aware that this was cold, but puzzled it out conscientiously. Back and forward across the stream the hounds swam; the scent was improving. From the bank we noted a rising keenness, a quickening of speed. We were forced to walk faster, then to trot, finally to run. Up through the pool-head, with a check under a thorn in the shallows, then in full cry through the next pool. The bank opposite us was a

hundred feet high, very steep and rocky, and full of places to which the hunted otter could retire. Again there was a check, but this was shorter than the one before, and the enthusiasm of the hounds was grand to see. A few hundred yards further a smaller stream joined this. The pack did not hesitate at the meeting of the waters, but helter-skelter dashed along the shingles up the Slue. The frequent fences were climbed, leapt, or tumbled over (in our haste, generally the latter), but, undeterred, on we went, sometimes along the river-banks, but at places we leapt into the shallow stream for quicker progress.

In front the hounds splashed from the shingles into deep water, and then, in place of the cheery hunting music, came the 'baffled' cry. The otter had taken refuge in a well-known drain. The wily old scoundrel got at grips with the first terrier with such success that it was forced to retreat. The moment attention was diverted out popped the otter; hounds dashed at him. The turmoil was indescribable. It seemed that the otter was so hard beset that he must be captured. He leapt back from the attack of Ruby till Juno was within an inch of him, then slid aside and dived beneath Crostic, reappearing behind Wormwood, and dashing over the back of the swimming Hector.

These motions I remember among scores equally

dexterous ; the agility and speed at which they were carried out is beyond expression. In a few agonizing seconds the otter wormed itself through the beleaguering pack, and I could hardly believe my eyes when the lithe, dark body dashed clear and shot through the water towards the shallows. Men had been posted here to cut off a possible retreat, but the otter evaded them with ease, dashing back towards the long pool from which he had just been driven. A second cordon hastily flung themselves in his path and baulked him a few seconds, while the hounds came racing down. But again the otter's marvellous agility saved him, and he was away toward the deep waters, finally getting to ground in an impregnable position among the rocks.

Moving upstream drags became more plentiful, and one otter, after a good run, was killed. He had trusted to retire into safety beneath a huge rock, but someone, anticipating this, had closed the passage. He fought for a moment in the open pool, doing some little damage before being overwhelmed with numbers.

For the next mile or so nothing negotiable was met with. A water-rat, chased into one pool by the youngest terrier, when outmatched in staying power, turned on its pursuer. The old huntsman, who stood by my side during this episode,

expressed his satisfaction at the promising manner in which the novice did this work, laughing heartily at the rat's disconcerting counter-attack and how it was repelled.

Long ere our familiar force and rocks were sighted we had a strong drag. This section of our river is a succession of rocks, pools, and cascades, and water races down at great speed. The circumstances were greatly in favour of our pursuit, yet the hounds stuck gamely to their work. Climbing out of the gorge, we followed as closely as possible, finally by a short cut getting to the force-dub at the same time as the pack. In my evening surveys I had never been able to locate the exact place from which the otters appeared, nor had it ever struck me previously as being worthy of search. The hounds swam about the pool. Hundreds of traces of otter life were apparent to them, but the holt could not be found. The veteran huntsman appealed to said that never in his long experience had anyone been able to reduce this stronghold. On one occasion, he stated, five otters were closely pursued from the lower pools. A bystander watched two of these enter the force-dub. Some yards they swam, then disappeared. Apparently the otters' stronghold had a subaqueous entrance.

We were chatting thus when a wandering

hound gave a gleesome cry, in which the others, scurrying together, rapidly joined. Away upstream they dashed in a fine frenzy, we poor humans labouring hard in the rear. In some five minutes the pack were recovered at the mouth of a drain where the otter had taken refuge. Our terrier speedily drove him out, and there was another lively run, terminating in our second kill. The otter, after nearly shaking off its pursuers by diving and doubling in a deep pool, tried too early to break back across the shallow. A hound caught a glimpse of him, and in a few seconds the whole pack was around.

After this a few more pools were visited without result, and the day's hunt came to an end. Then, and then only, we discovered that for hours we had been without food, that our clothes were sopping wet—we had some recollection of tripping headlong into pools on one or two occasions —and that our exertions by land and water had tired us out completely.

CHAPTER XV

TARN-FISHING BY MOONLIGHT

After having walked the fells for several years, it must be confessed that the finest series of experiences are met with in a ramble under the moonlight.

My companion was an angler; we had been staying awhile in Great Langdale, and now, having heard that splendid fishing was to be had in the mountain tarns during the hours of darkness, he was all eagerness to try such an expedition. Thus it was that we were steadily climbing the steep path to Stickle Tarn as

> 'The farewell light
> Blends with the solemn colouring of night.'

The day had been hot and cloudless, but now small wavy clouds were borne along in the breeze which sprang up as the sun descended into a crimsoned west. When at last we arrived at the edge of the upland mere, my friend, steeling him-

self against the beauties of the scene, put his rod together, and in the half-light began to select his flies. My mind, as I sat on a lichen-covered rock near by, was fully occupied in taking in the surrounding loveliness : the pale crags of Pavey Ark sheered up above steely-blue water, their skyline standing clear against the darkening, star-spangled blue. The shades in this rock-bound recess gradually thickened into darkness, though the surface of the tarn—like a mirror—reflected every moment more strongly the night-glow rising on the northern horizon. A great peace seemed to close around, and soon the silence was only broken by the splash as an occasional trout leapt to the banquet of night-flies, and by the tinkle and gurgle of tiny mountain streams. A strange restlessness possessed me, and I rambled about the hillside bordering the tarn, crossing many dry, rough watercourses, and passing through wide-spreading beds of moist bracken. Then the sharp summit to my right drew attention. It was Harrison Stickle, the highest of the Langdale Pikes, and on the moment I decided to extend my prowl to its top. My companion was apparently busy among the trout, and would not move far. Ten minutes' climb brought me to the cairn. What a splendid view there was! In the gray light, on all hands, tumbled gray mountain masses appeared ; the

valleys were completely hidden by long narrow clouds of night mist, and even the damp patches on the moors were canopied with shifting white vapour. It was a glorious night to be out of doors. As I anticipated, a cold breeze was circulating around the crest of the hill, so, after a brief survey, I made down to the tarn edge as rapidly as was advisable. The Waltonian was still pursuing his craft, but he was not meeting with much success, for the fish had now sated themselves with the insects which hung like a cloud of dust over the tarn. We were slowly moving along the water's edge, trying new casts, when my friend bethought him of Codale Tarn, about an hour distant across the fell. The ramble was exactly to my taste, so he took his rod to pieces and prepared for the walk. At first our route wound about among the boulders near the tarn-side, and as we suddenly came upon a tiny bay, my companion clutched me, pointing to a dark mass not thirty yards distant. A poacher was rigging up his lath, by means of which the best fish are still harvested from our mountain tarns and beck dubs. In a few minutes the instrument was being floated out into the almost imperceptible current. To the uninitiated it may be explained that the lath is a small board of light wood, to the lower edge of which a sufficiently heavy strip of lead has been affixed to make

it float edgeways up. To this strip are appended four or five hooks on lengths of fine gut or horse-hair. The board is floated out so that in its course from shore to shore it will cross the most 'fishy' pools and shallows. To assist in guidance the poacher usually has a fine line attached. The lath, long an illegal instrument, has the advantage of reaching the fish in large areas of water beyond the cast of the shore angler. It was prohibited mainly on the ground that many trout, which ultimately escaped, were ensnared on the hooks, and so damaged for more legitimate fishing. After getting his lath away the poacher walked smartly towards the head of the tarn, possibly with the intention of recapturing the board as it ended its voyage.

For some twenty minutes we wound up the damp slope towards Sergeant Man, thus avoiding the cliffs of Pavey Ark. It was not a pleasant walk; the lush grass was dripping with dew, and the track kept among peat bogs and holes, besides crossing deep, narrow beck-courses without the slightest warning. Many a time we nearly stumbled headlong into these water-worn excavations. From the top of the rise there was an almost bird's-eye view of the tarn; the shoals in the bays and near the outlet showed gray through the clear water, while the deeper places were dark to intensity. My companion pointed out that I

was now in a splendid position to understand the theory of tarn-fishing. 'Just at the point where the gray fades into the inky blue depths is the place where the trout most congregate.' A faint cat's-paw was ruffling the water ; the great poet of the open fells, William Wordsworth, must have reviewed some such scene when he wrote :

> 'Soft o'er the surface creep those lustres pale,
> Tracking the motions of the fitful gale.'

A line of silvery light now showed on the upper edge of a cloud bank, in the east, and in a few minutes the moon appeared. Its pale light gradually gained strength, and the whole air was silvern as we dropped down the slope to Codale Tarn. This water is famed for its monster trout, and my friend hoped to get a fair-sized specimen. This is one of the quietest and most out of the way corners in the Lake-Country. Tall cliffs rise abruptly from its shores, their screes falling in fan-shaped beds into the very water. As yet the gully—it is little wider—was in complete darkness, and it would be some hours before the moon rose sufficiently high in the heavens to flood it with light. In my walk round I raised a brace of summer snipe from the swamp at the head of the tarn ; with wild cries and loud drumming

of wings they rushed up into the air and out of sight.

A long whistle from my friend rang out over the silent dale ; the fish were not in biting humour, and he was tired of unproductive labour. As it was yet early, we decided not to return to Langdale, but to continue down the beck-side to Easedale Tarn. At 2 a.m. we began our three-mile walk, and an hour later sighted, through a gap in the wall of mountains, the gleaming surface of the tarn. On two or three occasions we had stopped to admire the effect of the moonlight: once on a clump of mountain ashes swaying on a lofty crag ; again on a waving bed of bracken. But the main part of our way lay through darkened gorges.

A couple of anglers had apparently reserved the boat, and were having a jolly time of it. As we approached they invited us to a row, while they rested in the roughly built hut close to the water's edge. Silvery moonlight pervaded everything ; the surface of the water shone, the sky was deeper blue than before, and thousands of stars gleamed. For an hour we paddled around, visiting the bays where the brooks brought down the tributes of hidden caves, and the beds of luxuriant water-weed by the outlet. A few small trout were panniered, then one of the boat-hirers

suggested that my friend should try trolling—*i.e.*, towing his line through the water. Almost immediately I saw a sudden straightening of my companion's arm, a tightening of the thin line, and beyond a tiny curl in the water. The rod-point was gradually raised, another circle broke the surface where the trout had maybe approached it, a mighty whirr of the reel, a few passes of the rod right and left, and a fine fish was being hauled in.

The sport improved as dawn neared. Already the moon was gleaming over the rough summits of Blakerigg, and a faint glow rising arch-like above the eastward fells. Accordingly we came to shore, and handed over the boat to its hirers, who were almost indignant at our refusal to enjoy the sport which was most justly theirs. My friend roved the shore, and his triumphant whistle again and again came to my ear as I explored gully after gully whence tinkling becks come down into the tarn. There is nothing more beautiful than these corners, where dripping moss and spray-washed rocks, clinging water-weed and rough heather, feathery mountain-ash and pendent-branched birches, combine to make attractive scenes.

Brighter and brighter glowed the sky; the intakes of Grasmere grew clearer through the

blue dawn-shadows, and then the glorious sun appeared. By this I had rambled back to the hut, and at five o'clock we four were breakfasting off fish which a short hour previously had swum freely in the tarn rippling outside.

BROOKLEY BRANCH

CHAPTER XVI

AT SHEARING-TIME

Though born of a long line of shepherds and living all my life in the region of mountain sheep-farms, I freely confess the charms of a day spent among shepherds, dogs, and sheep. I enjoy searching out the remotest domicile of the yeomen and being at home with its inhabitants. These dwellings are, as a rule, antique and roughly picturesque. Huge blocks of stone, apparently boulders from the near hillsides, have been built into their walls regardless of uniformity of surface either within or without; their rafters are covered with broad, thick flags or slates. One of my favourites is an old border fort; portions of its four gables still stand, but the rest of the keep is in ruins. To the shattered pile, a couple of centuries ago, a farm was built—a place of flagged floors, low ceilings, and diamond-paned windows. Another is at the head of an almost unknown dale, right in the heart of the moun-

tains. The house is so little altered from its original condition that some of its lower floors are still of trodden earth, as in the Saxon days when it was built.

In summer the shepherd has to be early afoot ; the sheep are more easily managed before the heat of the day. Accordingly, after releasing the three dogs from their kennel-outhouse, we made our way up the green track to the moors. The white-washed farm could be seen through the sycamores below. In the east a dark-blue arch was rising, forerunner of the first glow of dawn. Though it was only three a.m., a thrush was piping and larks were springing up from the intakes and meadows. Rabbits were out in the gray light, so busily browsing that few took alarm at our passage.

The shepherd told me that he was to bring all the sheep from his portion of the fell to be sheared. To understand how this was expeditiously and completely done, it must be remembered that the enclosure dealt with was about two miles square : the lower boundary by the beck in the dale, the upper on the crest of the hills, and at present hidden from our view by a projecting slope. No novice could have handled the task, though really the brunt of the work fell upon the dogs. Just a wave of the shepherd's arm, a call, and Jess,

the yellow-and-white collie, was racing across the grass some sixty yards above the lower wall, driving the sheep up the hill as it passed. Then Nan, a blue-haired dog of the old English breed, ran out, keeping a good way behind the other, and to the left, thus forcing the sheep still further from the edge of the moor. Sam, a dark mongrel of seemingly high intelligence, was 'heel-dog'—*i.e.*, held in reserve to assist in clearing the wider ghylls of sheep. I spoke to the shepherd about his dogs. He considered them good, but 'they were trained by himself.' Jess and Nan were seasoned ; Sam was but young, and this was his first year on the fell. A young sheep-dog is never allowed to leave the farm-buildings until about half-grown. Then its master takes it on to the fell, and allows it to run in company with his heel-dog, expecting it to pick up much training in this way.

We have been steadily moving along the sheep-paths through the dense bracken-beds, and have approached the corner of the allotment. The sheep feeding here are rapidly manœuvred into the open, and we turn up the slope. From the top of this we can see the highest boundary, and know that one-fourth of the fell has been cleared of sheep. Jess was immediately despatched to patrol the strip between us and the fence, Nan

remaining a long way beneath us. The shepherd turned a short way down the hill, leaving Jess to her task. Large bodies of sheep kept appearing on the sky-line, some three hundred yards above us, and Sam was sent to bring these down to join an ever-increasing flock wandering through the scree and parsley-fern in front. It is difficult to put into adequate words the manner in which these dogs work. Jess was not seen for almost two hours; we could hear her warning bark behind the hill, yet such was the dog's resource that she always brought her sheep to the lip of the slope as our dog was prepared to receive them, and placed, with machine-like accuracy, each batch a few hundred yards further in front of its predecessor. The work of the other dog, at a great distance down the hillside, must not be underestimated. Certainly the shepherd occasionally viewed *her* as she ran about among the ghylls and crags, driving the sheep over a front some quarter-mile wide. Though the distance was so great, Nan was so vigilant that not one of the stragglers was allowed to break back—and they made many attempts.

The sheep were now straggling by a hundred paths along the hillside. Soon after 6 a.m., we began to get glimpses of the coppices at the foot of our moor. The shepherd then whistled Jess

to bring down the remainder of the sheep from the higher ground, Nan to remain stationary. If not digressing, the whistle of the shepherd is according to a well-understood code between men and dog. A long whistle (commonly called a 'crow') means 'drive on'; a sharp, jerky sound, 'lie down.' These are combined with arm-motions, which are thoroughly understood. In a few minutes the dog above had finished, and we were ready to leave the allotment. My friend, however, had not completed his work, as in his flock many animals had already been sheared. Driving the mob into the corner next the gate, he began picking these out. The dogs, no matter how it tried to escape, speedily had the sheep he indicated detached from the main body, and it was then driven off to wander back on the hillside. One-fifth of the flock were thus weeded out. I noticed that the more savage ewes resented the dogs' presence, and one charged Jess. To all appearance taken by surprise, the dog nimbly evaded the rush, which would certainly have meant serious injury. Then, as the sheep dashed past, she turned, and, overhauling it in a few bounds, seized it by the cheek. Overbalanced, the sheep immediately rolled over, and in a few seconds was trotting back thoroughly cowed. It was an easy matter driving down to the farm and

leaving the bulk in a near pasture, whence they would be taken as the shearers required them.

The clipping-day was formerly a much-esteemed festival. The dales-farmer then invited the staffs of all the adjacent holdings to help him shear his flock, appointing a certain day for the task. The work of the day commenced at 6 a.m., and there was usually a large company of men and women present. While the men took off the fleeces, the women rolled them up and prepared them for the wool-stapler. In a few hours the work was done and a holiday proclaimed, for many hands make light work. Stimulants were freely served out, and the condition of the less temperate, before the day's task concluded, was extremely dangerous to the sheep. Foolish boastings would be made as to who could shear the largest number in an hour, and a competition take place. In their half-drunken condition the shearers spoiled many a pound of good wool by cutting it unevenly, and, by their reckless handling of the shears, brought blood on many a sheep. Considering the nearness to the skin of many important veins and muscles, it is a matter of wonder that more animals were not damaged. Then the amount of food and drink—and fells etiquette demanded that these should be of the best possible quality—

consumed was enormous, one farmer estimating to me that the cost of a certain clipping would run to nearly ten shillings a head at a most modest computation. Some sixty persons were present on this occasion, and upwards of a thousand sheep were sheared. At most farms nowadays the 'clipping' has been done away with. The shepherd, since the fells have for the most part been enclosed, is not so hard pressed with work during the long summer days, and he is expected to shear as many sheep as possible. Moreover, the wool of various cross-breds becomes ripe earlier than the usual date, and unless these fleeces are taken at the right moment, their value is considerably impaired.

Shearing was going on in the bracken barn, a low, rough building without any means of lighting save the doorway. The doors had been taken off their hinges, and, supported on stout trestles, were being used as a table for the folding of fleeces. The shearers were each seated astride of a rough creel, and the sheep brought before them by assistants. The scissors were smartly plied, and as you watched, the gray wool fell away from the carcass rapidly. An apt clipper can manage ten to twelve sheep per hour on a day's work, but with picked animals as many as thirty-two have been done in the hour.

There is a knack in folding those long, loose, wide fleeces into compact little bales. The wool from the hind-legs is first thrown back on the centre of the piece, then a roll is made, which gradually takes in the wool of the body, finishing with the neck covering. This is the least valuable of the seven staples in a fleece, and is wound round to secure the wool, after being twisted into a loose rope. The bales are each marked with the flock-owner's initial, and this marking is the customary work of the master on clipping day.

Mentioning marks brings to mind an incident in that day's work. A man shearing away in the darker corner suddenly gave an exclamation. We looked round. 'Begocks, Jack,' he said to the master, 'thoo's gitten yan o' me ahld yows (ewes) there!' And, sure enough, there were the brands on hoof and horn. 'When did yeh miss it?' asked our flockmaster. 'Didn't miss it at all.' This sheep had quietly slipped into our flock, and probably for weeks had passed the scrutiny of the shepherd.

A final part of the day's proceedings was the counting up of the sheep. Besides the one which the farmer had identified, over forty sheep had been separated as not belonging to the farm, and when the numbers were totalled our flock was

over fifty short. These had probably found their way to adjacent sheep-walks, and would be returned either when the other flocks were clipped or at the Shepherds' Meet in autumn.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN THE SEA-TROUT RUN

Seawards the gulls were rising and falling on tireless wing in the clear sunshine. Beneath their wheeling flocks the sea-fish were lying waiting for a 'spate' to allow them to run up the valley streams emptying into the bay behind the sandbars. At present the waters were dead low, and long tongues of mud and ooze encroached on the channel from all sides. At Saturday's sunset a gray mist clung where sea meets sky, changing into a fiery crimson when the sun's declining rays were shot through its banks, and men who floated over the fish at the following daybreak reported a great commotion among the shoals, and judged that the opportunity for their migration was approaching. All day gauzy bluffs of cloud collected and hung almost stationary in the sky, so that by nightfall the gray folds had lowered their edges almost to touch the jagged peaks fencing the dale. Warned by the morning's news, next day

we walked some seven miles up the river we had selected to fish to an old-fashioned inn, where we should be within easy reach of some productive pools. As the hours passed, the south-westerly sky grew darker, faint, distant lightnings played here and there among the piled-up clouds, and at about half-past five in the afternoon there was a vivid flash, a long, reverberating roll of thunder, followed by a heavy fall of rain in drops as large as marbles.

Earth and air alike smelt fresh when we left the inn at midnight to fish till dawn or beyond. The rain had ceased; the last white cloud was wrestling its way through the distant semicircle of mountains, and the firmament was bright with countless stars. The watersides were slippery; the lush grass beaded with raindrops; a thin mist hung over the river. The pool selected for our start would by day have been accounted lovely; darkness prevented our seeing its details. Against the starry sky the rugged bluffs sheered darkly; below their line, in varying degrees and depths of brown and black, were the braes and coppices.

Our first station was on a large bed of gravel, which almost divided this pool from its successor. My friend was to cast into the lower dub from the opposite bank; my attention was to be paid

chiefly to the wimpling, slack waters at my feet. Our flies were fitted in a trice—the peculiar lure required was not that we had anticipated—then, though we did not expect much success yet awhile, we wetted our lines. The silence was broken only by the gurgling of the river, the tinkling over their rocky beds of rivulets, varied now and again by the lilt of some nocturnal singer (a reed-warbler, probably, as the sound came from the patch of watergrass a score yards downstream), or the harsh, grating churr of the nightjar as it hawked in the gloom for moths. We had been fishing some time when there was a quiet whistle, and an otter emerged from its holt in the heather-clung and aspen-crested pile of rocks. Without raising a splash or a ripple the animal took the water. Had we desired it, there was no opportunity to seek cover without warning it of our presence, so, rod in hand, we stood, remaining unperceived because of the dark masses of wood and fell at our back, while the otter swam about the pool, rising and diving, swimming and floating, graceful and silent in every evolution as a fish. Another whistle; from a lower pool its mate replied. The otter turned, and, unseen in the shadow, passed us with the stream. Just behind us there was a slight struggle and splashing; the creature had met and captured its first

sea-trout of the season. In the mellow midnight we saw it bring its prey ashore, and eat it; then, slipping back into the water, the otter again disappeared, though at intervals its whistle sounded up the water. This by-play—familiar, yet never wearying, to the frequenter of riversides—occupied us awhile. Now, with every cast we felt that sport was nearing; the darkling pools between which we stood would, we had been assured, receive some of the earliest fish in the stream.

The water was rising, too, slowly at first, but more rapidly as the hours went on. The surcharged bogs and tarns of the upland valleys were sending down their surplus; the level of our pool rose two feet in twenty minutes. Then success came. A slight 'feel' on the line and an upward flick of the wrist drove the steel home. The fish shot up the pool, to be checked by a slight drag on the line. Then it dashed for the overhanging weedy bank, but a movement of the rod-point perforce changed its direction. Then it sulked awhile, and pulled till the thin gut seemed ready to part, shot forward and sideways, rose to the surface or sank to the shilloes, right, left, with the rod passing to suit its tactics, and the reel hissing or rattling as line was lengthened or drawn in. It did its utmost to cause a tangle or to break away in vain. Then it tired, and, after a last despairing

attempt to get into the lower pool, came, still fighting, within reach of the landing-net, and finished its life-struggle on the wet grass beneath the coppice. Fish after fish came to the hook, some to be caught, a few to escape. Long ere the dawn-light shone on the far-off mountains fish were swarming up from the sea in large numbers, and the river was roaring in full flood. The rise gradually drove us further up the gravel tongue, separating us more widely every hour.

At daybreak we stopped for a long rest and to compare notes. My companion showed with pride six fine silvery trout, but his lip explanation of my success as luck did not accord with his eye envy of my take of sixteen. The scene around was grand. Down every fold in the hills the rivulets were rushing in white lines ; the roar of water alone was heard in the little valley. We returned to our angling, but were tired and rather careless. At full day we left the pool we had stood so long by for another lower down—a rock-dub where usually particularly fine fish lay. To reach the fishable part of this with the river at flood-height was a matter of great difficulty, and my companion did not consider it worth the trouble. To get to the best station I had to sidle along a wet, sloping ledge with twelve feet of yellow surges boiling at my feet, then from a

narrow platform leap to a detached mass of rock. On the tiny cliff-bound beach just beyond this I saw another fisher—a heron. For a while he did not notice my approach (the thunder of the force drowned all other sounds), being busy watching the movements of some submerged body. Then he hopped a yard into the surges, and the strong, sharp beak was plunged far into the smother. He had struck true ; a small sea-trout was impaled. Tossing his head back, and at the same time jerking the fish some way into the air, he caught it as it fell. There was a gulping motion and a swelling of his thin neck as the food slid down. My angling of the same pool was not more successful—one small fish only was beguiled from the creamy torrent.

Just before we left the waterside the mouth of a strong discoloured beck attracted us. In a minute we had a couple of worms from under the wet sods, and, notwithstanding fine hooks and flies, fixed them, and were soon fishing merrily. Brown trout were about in fair number we knew, but we did not anticipate such instant success. We had two fish apiece in less than ten minutes. My second was a lusty fighter, and gave some anxious moments. This halt occasioned my companion to look over the steep bank where the main current, in almost clear volume, was roaring

along. 'There's a big pike just down here.' I cautiously inspected. Yes; there was a tremendous jack just outside the reeds, apparently on the alert for food. Well, this was luck; but how were we with twenty-ounce rods and sea-trout flies and tackle to get it? J. was quite bent on its capture, so, picking up his pannier, he trotted off to the inn, where a pike-rod was to be had. I stayed to watch the fish, and managed to employ the time in making long casts to the tail of the reach in the hope of catching something. As sea-trout were swarming up the stream, it is not remarkable that my fly was taken before long. I thought verily a monster had come; but no, it proved to be the delusive weight of a two-ounce fish, aided by the drag exerted on the wet line by the swift stream. I soon had it landed, and when J. came up offered it as bait for the pike. He caught on to the idea eagerly. The pike-hooks locally used were clumsy affairs, but he had brought from his portmanteau the thing we required. Now, from some yards upstream he let the live bait float down, giving it jerks almost to simulate natural motion. From my station I could see that Master Jack had this incautious vagrant fish in his mind when still yards away. He sidled up the water, almost without moving his fins, nearer, nearer, then made a rush at the

towing bait, seized it, and half turned to sweep into his reedy retreat. But before his evolution had more than begun, J.'s wrist flicked upward, the barbs were driven home, and Jack was fighting for very life. Local pike anglers use tackle of prodigious strength. J. had no need to humour his fish, but forcibly hauled him right within reach of my net. A second more, and he was flapping his last among the lush meadow-grass.

This was a fitting close to our night's sport, and we made our way back to the inn, richer for one splendid experience of fishing and the waterside at night.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE WAY UP

The moors I am most acquainted with are situate at high altitudes among the mountains. They are stocked with the indigenous grouse mostly, though the tussocky grass braes afford a few hares. In the bosky places by stream and tarn are snipe, and the environs of coppices, whins, and woods may be favoured by rabbits. In the etceteras of a bag from a moor of this kind will be found occasional wild duck, black game, with heron and curlew when any of the party desire these birds. And let it be added that these latter are indeed worthy of attention from the culinary point of view.

We reached the wayside station at sunset, and were soon within the precincts of the hills. Once or twice in the gathering gloom we heard a torrent roaring and booming in its rocky bed far beneath. Then our road climbed higher. Away to the northward, across miles of undulating dark

moor, the fells were pluming themselves with fleecy night clouds, a heron craiked overhead as it made cumbrous flight towards the distant sea, the wailings of curlew and plover sounded eerie across the solemn wastes. The moor track rose higher, our ponies walked up the steeper pitches, then at the crest of the ascent our driver flicked his whip in the direction of a distant light : 'Craigmere—home!'

At supper our host explained that this was the first 'shoot' of his season. We would be called at daybreak, walk up the fell (the gradient was too steep and rugged for wheeled traffic) some six miles to the huts, where we would have a second 'breakfast' and a forenoon's shooting. We were to return in time for luncheon.

That evening I looked out of my window and wondered whether in the chill dawn I would lag overmuch in the ascent of that beetling hillside. I was out of condition for such a task. Six miles of that country would require more energy than as many leagues of meadow-land.

Gray day was creeping through the clouds as we turned out. Beyond the Squire's small park we reached the open moor. The beaters opened out, and at intervals in their lines guns were posted. Then the advance began. The ground was only sparsely populated with game, and we

had gone some distance before the first shot was fired. I was on the extreme left of the line. The covey rose about our centre and flew right across the brae. Two doubles were delivered at them as they came—all misses. Seen in the dim dawnlight, with a mantle of shifting gray night-clouds as a background, a covey of grouse does not afford an ideal mark. As the whirr of wings approached I stepped forward to get a clearer view, as a gnarled hawthorn intervened, but my foot slipped among the sopping bracken, and I came down on hands and knees. Of course, the covey got clean away, much to the disgust of the men who were beating them up. The system on which our operations were carried out was, brutally speaking, a gamble for the birds' lives. We were advancing in a long straight line in very open order. The guns were only able to cover a small portion of our face, and many birds got clear away without a shot being discharged at them. Others were not so fortunate, rising right under the muzzles of our guns.

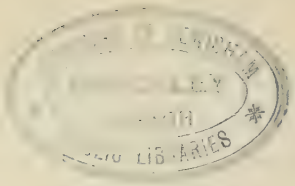
For awhile no birds came my way, then there was a wonderful sequence from the edge of a heather belt, and I fired as fast as I could get the shells out. About forty minutes after firing began we were far up the hillside, enjoying an almost bird's-eye view of Craigmere and its surroundings.

The worst part of the ascent had been got over, and, contrary to expectations, the journey, with its attendant shooting, had exhilarated me wonderfully.

Though we had reached the immediate crest above the valley, we were still some two miles of undulating fell distant from the huts, with some climbing to do. The long line of beaters and guns swung out again, but we were soon in difficulties. Though steep, the ground so far had been fairly regular, but here it was seldom that you could see a clear two hundred yards among the irregular hillocks. I came suddenly on a deep ghyll across which I must pass. Sliding down the cliff to the water, I crossed the rocky bed, and began to climb the bracken slope in front. So steep was this that I found my only chance of gaining ground was by clutching the green, waving stems, and with such scant support pulling myself up. When I reached the level of the moor again I heard shots in front. The majority of the guns had met the ghyll at a less difficult place. My turn, however, was to come. As I got on to a small eminence a beater called 'Hare!' Similar calls had been errors, but this time, as I stood ready, the hare bolted. He barely showed his tawny body as he scampered away between two stretches of heather, but he was

a fair mark, and my aim was true. The nearest beater, with a chuckle of delight, sprang forward at the report, almost treading on a brace of snipe rising from the sphagnum bog occupying the tiny boddem. He leapt back in amaze, yelling, 'Ware snipe!' As they drummed away I gave them my single. It was a snapshot, but reached one of them. It fluttered down wounded not far from where the hare lay. What a neat bird the snipe is! Its long, pliable bill contrasts with its grayness of plumage pleasingly. But a cock grouse, with its tufts of coloured feathers and erect carriage, is fitly the king of our moorland birds. Moving on steadily, we reached the lip of the valley-head in which the huts were situate. Below was as wild a scene as could be imagined. Boulders were strewn everywhere, and huge fan-shaped beds of scree encroached from the scaurs opposite us. I halted awhile for the others to come up. My beaters knew of a covey of grouse lying not three hundred yards away, and desired me to try and get them. I accordingly went forward, guided by the men. The birds rose; I fired, bringing down a couple. What followed is known in general to every grouse-shooter. The dead birds sailed down, as it seemed, slowly on their outstretched, stiffening pinions. A sheep was watching in mild-eyed wonder the noisy

intruder to its peaceful haunt, and one of the descending bodies struck against its quarter as, sheep-fashion, it turned to flee. The shock was sufficiently strong to cause the animal to reel in its gallop. I am told of men in huts being knocked over in like fashion by dead 'driven' birds, but this is as near as has come under my notice.



CHAPTER XIX

SALMON POACHING

A DEEP dell in a deer-park, down which a river is roaring in full spate. The foreground is occupied by a long dub, the surface of which is furrowed with swiftly flowing currents. Down the hollow comes the thunder of fosses and of waterbreaks; behind, as we stand by the foot of the discoloured pool, the waters are rippling and chasing over a sloping bed of shale and stones. Further down stream is another pool, where, at high tide, salt water mingles with the fresh. In the alleys of the coppices the brackens are dying, the leaves of birch and oak, sycamore, lime, and ash are in the 'turning' stage, after which they will be swept away in the gales. A strong breeze is even now sweeping along the ferny braes and rides, above the tossing forest scudding rain-clouds move from seaward, but in the declivity the air is still, and the purl and rumble of the surcharged river drowns all other sounds. A few deer wander about the

glades ; from a railed-in covert a pheasant, alarmed at some unseen thing, rockets skyward ; rabbits lop about the tussocks and in and out of their burrows. Such are the surroundings of the poacher's beloved salmon-dub. Above the park the stream is closely watched by water-bailiffs, to whom the signs and methods of the salmon-poacher are as an open book ; but the gamekeeper in whose domain lies this series of dubs is at this season paying close attention to the feathered game on the edge of the demesne furthest from the river.

In the late afternoon the poacher comes to the small wayside public-house, a mile as the crow flies from the salmon pool, occupied by self-styled (and self-interested) 'friends of the poor man,' who are in reality the abettors of all forms of poaching and the receivers of its products. In his dawdling journey from the low resort in which he has been hiding (for your regular hand knows better than allow the authorities to be suspicious of his presence when the salmon are entering the streams), the poacher has turned round half a dozen times and smartly gone over the last mile or so of his 'back-trail,' to assure himself that he is not being followed by some alert representative of the law. Yesterday, threading a maze of direct and indirect paths, he brought the net he is to use, and hid it

at a convenient point in the rabbit warren. These nets are deftly made, strong, yet of fine texture and little bulk. Few persons in a countryside are able to do the intricate knotting and meshing required, and to lose his net in the water or have it confiscated is a greater disaster than personal capture to the habitual poacher. When not in use the nets are carefully hidden: chimneys, water-butts, hen-roosts, outhouses of all sorts, hollow trees, are all at times pressed into service. A story is told of a poacher's wife, a portly dame, who, when the searchers came to her house, wound a fine but valuable net round her generous-sized body beneath her dress, and thus attired conducted the searchers into every corner of her domicile. Beds were dishevelled, cupboards ransacked, chimneys examined, but without success. 'Na doot ye think ye'r smart, me lads, but it'll tak sharper yeds (heads) ner yours to find a net in this hoos (house),' was her final sarcasm, as the baffled band of searchers withdrew.

The poaching class is always a well-known and oftentimes a dreaded one, but it is difficult to capture them in the possession of illegally obtained game, nets, or other incriminating evidence. Poachers sometimes work in gangs of from six to twelve when some large affair is in contemplation, but more often two or three operate together. A

dip-net is then generally used, which may be handled by a single man. When opened out this is almost the shape of a solid triangle. The long top-edge is secured to rings, through which a pole eight or ten feet in length is pushed. Thus, the bag of the net hangs behind. Wading into the pool knee-deep or further, the poacher lowers his net to the depth at which he knows the fish are lying, then draws it up stream and towards the bank. Here his companion helps to draw it to land. As, besides soaked net and pole, the fish enmeshed may be upwards of forty pounds in weight in a successful 'draw,' such aid is clearly necessary.

To-night we lie by the salmon pool. As the last light fades we take our position in a brake commanding a view of the most productive dubs. The night is calm but overclouded—typical of the stage of the year—and a heavy dew has sodden the luxuriant grass. This means discomfort for us, as, should we desire to change positions to see the poachers at their work, we must do so crawling among the wet tangle of twigs and tussocks. Our position is a fortunate one; by carefully forcing our way forward we can get close to the water's edge without being seen by anyone outside the coppice. It does not do, even at this early hour, to show any presence; the poacher, with a whole-

some dread of consequences, will make a dozen simple traps, by which the presence of a watcher may be detected in due time. The night falls around. The fine detail of the trees is lost, the bluffs above become mere black outlined masses against a darkling sky, and by the river it becomes so gloomy that the waters can hardly be seen. But beyond the shadow of the trees it is a little brighter, and faint glimmerings are cast by the tumbling waters reflecting the less densely black clouds above. It is an ideal night, an opportunity which the poacher cannot resist.

About midnight two figures slink about in the shadows; the poachers are reconnoitring ere they begin work. At last they creep in the shelter of the river-bank to the part of the warren in which the net is hid. One of them—a gray, rough-looking man he seems in the half-light—draws it out and lays it ready, attaching the necessary sinkers, while the other cautiously penetrates the coppice for a pole on which to fix it. Then the elder rigs the net, and carries it down to the tail of the pool. It is at once apparent that he has year after year poached salmon from this dub; without hesitation he wades knee-deep into the turgid water, and with his eye measures distances. Yes; a shoal of salmon will be lying under the alders, and a second in the swirl on the other side of the

pool, where the down-coming torrent is deflected by a projecting rock. He quietly lowers the net to the water, then allows the sinkers (large stones) to pull it down. When the pole-tip is also immersed he steadies himself in the swirling stream, and begins to draw the net forward and inward. This is slowly done, for the water pressure is great, and the heavy surges repeatedly almost wrench the contrivance from his hand ; but at last, with much labouring, he has the net within reach of his confederate, who brings it ashore. The spoil is fairly good we gather from their movements, for the little school of salmon under the alders ready to pass to the upper waters has been enmeshed. It is, apparently, not the men's intention to do more on this side of the stream ; for, one carrying the net and pole rolled up on his shoulder, and the other a bag containing the capture, they wade out into the stream, and, though the water is up to the armpits and running strongly, essay the crossing. In mid-stream the old man staggers ; he has placed his foot on something slippery, and the stream threatens to bear him down. His companion, however, clutches him, and holds him up till a firmer foothold is obtained. Then, as the further bank is neared and the race of waters reaches only waist deep, an overhanging branch sweeps against the elder's head

and knocks off his cap. As he makes a grab at the cloth rapidly being borne out of reach, up from the water between him and it leaps a big fish. Startled at this sudden appearance, the old man slackens his grip on the bag containing the evening's spoil, and it is swept away. In the flurry of the moment he continues the movement for his cap, and ere he can desist the roaring river has swept the salmon-bag from sight. There is, when at last both men get ashore, a hurried search, an excited dialogue—judging from their movements—then, carefully hiding their net among the bushes, both men glide from sight towards the edge of the park. This, no doubt, is an opportunity for alarming the gamekeeper, but we cannot bring ourselves to betray those who for a short time have been our unwitting, interesting companions. If they would cross that raging flood for the sake of a few fish, we argue that they deserve them, and act accordingly. We are damp and chilled to the marrow; their condition must, indeed, be pitiable. Of course, the poacher is hardened to such exposure as fording a stream on an autumn night, but to us who have witnessed the perilous passage something heroic and far above the usual meanness of the poacher character seems reflected in that wild plunge.

My companion did not think that the poaching

was completed, for, he pointed out, 'the net has not been dismantled ; it is lying yonder prepared for another draw.' Accordingly, we awaited their return. If we kept within the shadows—the river was between us and where the net lay—we could restore circulation to our numbed bodies without being seen.

Events transpired as my comrade had said. After a long wait we saw figures moving on the brae across the stream. This time the younger man essayed the placing of the net, relying for guidance on his more experienced mate. The first dip caught but little ; the older man scarce deigned to open the bag to receive what was brought up. A lively customer was in the next netful ; in its struggles the young man was jerked in all directions, but he stuck to his task, and finally got the fish ashore. Still the old man was not satisfied ; he pointed to the rising light in the east, and took hold of the net-pole himself. He waded further into the stream, allowed the net to sink, then, bending so as to pit his energy against the current, he began to 'draw.' The result of this single haul was splendid ; the bag was filled, and with cautious movements the poachers drew away from the waterside. Now that nothing further was to be seen we made for a footpath, intending to give tardy warning to the keepers. We reached the

main road to find two of his subordinates guarding a pair of men and a trap loaded with the night's haul of salmon. The poachers had been cleverly entrapped.

We told the head-keeper of the fish lost in the stream, and joined in the search. The bag contained almost sixty pounds of freshly run salmon, which would have brought some £4 on the local markets.

CHAPTER XX

BRINGING DOWN THE SHEEP

As November advances the sheep farmer of the Westmorland dales is faced with the difficult question of when to bring his flock down from the fells. So long as fair weather lasts the sheep find sufficient sustenance on the higher ground, but an untoward rainstorm, followed by dense mists, or an early snowstorm, always involves great hardships. On the other hand, it is essential that the stock should be kept on the hills till forced to retire, as under ordinary conditions it is impossible for the flock-owner to accumulate sufficient forage to last the sheep through a long winter. The hay-crop of the dales is usually a light one, and roots, etc., to eke it out cannot be grown.

Every farm in our dale has the right to send sheep on to the common lands which stretch for miles in every direction. As it would be inconvenient for the flocks to wander at will over this extensive area, the farms have for centuries past

attached to themselves certain well-defined portions of heaf, or upland pasture ; and the fact that a sheep bred on one part of a fell is loath to leave it makes it possible to drive large numbers into a stated position, where they will require but little attention during the whole of the summer. When, therefore, in early winter it becomes imperative to bring down the sheep (for they could not exist on the mountains during the rigours of winter), the farmer holding land nearest the dale first collects and drives off his flock, the others following as the way becomes clear.

The shepherd I was to accompany held the remotest piece of land belonging to our dale, and deserters from his flock frequently found their way into that of a Borrowdale farmer. They therefore arranged to be afoot early, and to thoroughly examine their flocks before driving off the fell. At about half-past two in the morning I was called out, and soon we were passing through the folds toward the fell. Not a cloud was visible, and the starlight was sufficiently brilliant to give some idea of the outlines of the surrounding country. We were in for a long walk before we could reach our heaf—a wild, lonely upland basin, surrounded by rocky cliffs. How silent is the night before ' bringing down the sheep '; every dog in the valley seems to know the tedious work in store, and

hardly a bark arouses the echoes. High above a curlew is crossing to a neighbouring mountain tarn, its wild, eerie whistle ringing over the quiet dale. A couple of otters have come out from their impregnable holts in the rocky bank of the brawling stream, and are skilfully fishing the dark, deep dubs, occasionally exchanging a soft whistle of triumph. The air was very cold, and hoar crunched beneath our feet as we got higher up the valley head. Now I slipped and stumbled among the débris brought down by the recent floods, for the pathway lay deep with stones and rubble, and progress was made with difficulty. The shepherd, however, with the ease of custom, plodded away through the rough masses, never slipping, never halting. For an hour we kept on in this manner, and I was becoming exhausted. Then we turned into a steep ghyll, whence a strong stream was issuing, and at the head of this our heaf begins. The shepherd with three dogs keeps high up the fellside, myself with Jess going down a good way to prevent any sheep escaping over the lower boundary. It was too dark at first to see very distinctly, but the sounds of whistling and repeated barking helped me to keep in touch with the work. At the northern boundary the light improved so much that I could see the Borrowdale shepherd and his dogs at work. Their heaf

was much simpler to drive than ours, being a long grass slope broken only by a few shallow water-courses. My dog gradually cleared the ground in front, and before long a couple of hundred sheep were rambling toward the place on which the shepherd had agreed to converge. After a while my companion called down for me to cease driving till he came closer. It was a grand sight to see him direct his three dogs to thoroughly work the open space above ; he was standing a long way down the slope in order to see the full face of the rock face, and to him the dogs kept turning for direction. Then, in the words of Wordsworth :

> 'Waving his hat, the shepherd, from the vale,
> Directs his winding dog the cliffs to scale ;
> The dog, loud barking, 'mid the glittering rocks,
> Hunts, where his master points, the intercepted flocks.'

After a long wait the shepherd signalled me to bring up the quota Jess had collected to join his flock, the majority of which were at present hidden by a corner of the hill. At a steady walk I followed the drove through the bracken ; by a hundred trails they were going on in front. There was a warning bark from Jess if anyone delayed to nibble a piece of green grass—a rarity in the sopping hillside ; this disregarded, the old dog was away, and speedily harrying the ewe in question. Then she would return to my side and

solemnly take charge, giving me hints on the best paths to follow, till another delinquent attracted her attention. My flock now passed over the rocky shoulder out of sight in front. At the crest of this hill—a sharp ridge of bare rock—there burst before my eyes the splendid sight of 2,000 sheep congregated into a small recess of the mountain. From above, long lines of gray fleeces were coming down by various slacks and paths, while a chorus of barks told me that the shepherd was close at hand and massing the flock into this hollow. From this there was quite a narrow exit by which the brook escaped, and here the shepherd posted himself, after telling the dogs to lie down. Their very presence at their posts would move the sheep quickly enough for his purpose. In a few seconds a sheep came wandering down the path, then another, and then a third. In a short time there was a continuous passage in front, and every sheep was scrutinized closely. Nan, the shepherd's favourite dog, was constantly picking out and driving stray sheep into the ghyll behind us ; in an hour some fifty had been so separated. How is it that a shepherd knows his own so well? It is not entirely because he remembers each face, but that each farm has its recognised mark. Stang sheep are marked with a red 'pop' on the right shoulder, to see which the shepherd had planned

their being driven with this side toward his station. But where sheep have a wet lair for days together, where their wool is frequently soaked by the dense cloud-banks, and where they have to feed among beds of dripping bracken and heather, these marks are not seldom washed out. Our entry in the parson's herd-book, therefore, reads : 'Red pop on right shoulder, branded S on right horn.' The latter, being indelible by fair means, is referred to in all cases of doubt. The shepherd was now separating all which did not show the red mark conspicuously, for further examination. The procession of sheep was long ; sometimes they came in knots and bunches, at others the dogs had to show themselves in order that a constant passage might be kept up. By 9 a.m., however, all had been reviewed, and some hundred and fifty had been driven into the ghyll. I was afraid that a few might escape, but the shepherd knew otherwise. When he was at last ready to attend to them—the other sheep meanwhile having been driven far down the hill—the dogs were posted so that there might be no danger of a general stampede, and then he walked among them. Some were distinctly ours by their horn brandings, others as clearly belonged to Borrowdale. Our sheep were sent in batches, under the charge of Sam, the dark mongrel, to where the

bulk of the flock were feeding. Then the other sheep were brought out, and driven clear of the ghyll. Through a field-glass we could distinctly see the other shepherds of our dale clearing their heaf—the nearest to the dale-gate were already moving away, whilst some of the others had scarcely finished bringing their sheep from the crag-beds. At about eleven o'clock the Borrowdale shepherd came. The two looked over the 'Borrowdale' strays, then turned their attention to the 'Langdale' sheep which Wilson had brought from his flock. My companion speedily had his own down into the dale to join their comrades, keeping those belonging to other farms close at hand. In the 200 these men so rapidly handled there was but one which they could not, by reading its marks, give an owner to, and this my friend agreed to take to the Shepherds' Meet, where doubtless its possessor would put in an appearance to claim it.

Now we were ready to leave the fell. The shepherd next to us was moving his sheep towards the head of the dalesroad, and as he cleared the ground, we followed. Progress was slow ; every now and again a shepherd would drive across a group of our strays, and receive in turn the ones belonging to his farm which we had separated. Thus the afternoon wore on. The whole length

of the road was occupied by flocks, dragging along at a snail's pace; for it was advisable that there should be no undue pressure in passing the gateway to the dale. Here more of the flock-owners were standing, prepared to identify any of their sheep which still were separated from the right flock. They gave out unmistakable opinions of approval as the procession trickled past, for the sheep were certainly in grand condition.

The day had been a long and arduous one, and dogs and men were alike tired. But we had been favoured with good weather. On one similar occasion we had been caught in a rainstorm; another time we were suddenly enveloped, when at the height of the day's work, in a snow-squall. There was nothing for it then but to seek shelter from the cutting blast, and this, fortunately, was at hand. A sheepfold with a tiny hog-house, a lean-to building against a wall of rock, was welcome. I shall never forget the despairing looks of the sheep as they sank down to gain what shelter they could among the boulders from the gale shrieking around them.

CHAPTER XXI

A WINTRY ESCAPADE

It is conceded that the fell-lander gets his fox-hunting under difficult conditions, and that on occasion the hunt gets into very serious situations. Not long ago a fox was chased from the jaws of Garburn Pass across the hundred crags of Saltern Knotts towards Rainsbarrow Crag, a tremendous face of rock, half a mile wide at the base and hundreds of feet high. Its ledges afford security to numerous foxes; the one pursued, presumably, was of these, for, when hustled, he took a direct line at his best pace for this refuge. Without hesitation, the hounds dashed in among the slippery ledges, leaping up and down, and galloping where a man could not possibly have crawled. At one point the chase came so near the summit of the crag that the 'hunters' (who had followed the hunt along the highest ground), looking down a narrow gully, saw the gallantly-chased fox climb wearily

to a narrow ledge, there, apparently, to await the onslaught of his grim pursuers. But in such fox-haunted regions strange incidents occur, and the spectators were chagrined to hear the leaders of the pack speak to a fresh trail. This 'new' fox was also viewed dashing along the rocks at a great pace some ten yards beneath his wearied brother, followed shortly by hound after hound in single file. Agile and handy as the mountain fox-hound undoubtedly is, he is no match for Reynard among the cliffs, and the latter speedily forges ahead. One hound, sighting the fox as he leapt round a boulder, rushed forward in reckless lust a few yards; then, at the corner where the ledge was unusually narrow, he lost balance and, with a wild scream, fell, to be dashed to pieces on the scree-beds far beneath. Others of the pack lost footing in less dangerous positions, and these had to be rescued with ropes. This work is both exciting and difficult. The cries ringing along the sheer rocks are bad guides to the hounds' real location. When this is arrived at, the shepherds scramble as near as possible, generally to find a score feet of rock without a vestige of holds for hands or feet separating them from the maybe injured hound. Looping the rope carefully round a protruding pinnacle, a man is lowered to the rescue. Of course, a hound has to be carefully

handled under such circumstances ; an error in holding it may cause it to writhe free of its carrier to certain death on the rocks beneath.

Some of our fells are covered with dangerous cliffs, and these are the haunts of the wildest and most daring foxes. The casualties among packs when hunting such areas are heavy. I am assured by enthusiastic hunt-followers that so cute do some of the vermin become after many escapes that they will retire slowly, allowing hounds to come quite close before they whisk out of sight over the brink. Time and again a too eager hound will rush on to the cliff-top, miss his footing ; his body is picked up hundreds of feet below, crushed out of all semblance to its original shape. Sometimes, however, Reynard dallies too long. A trio of hounds were running fast along the grass stretch crowning Wetherlam after a crag-fox. The redskin slackened pace as the crest of the big scaur was neared, but the hounds, not scenting danger, raced along the harder. Just as the prize dodged over the lip of the rock, its foremost pursuer reached him, and with the impact both rolled down the steep, at the foot of which the cliffs fall, like a wall, round a scree-doup. The other hounds, also unable to check their onrush, fell over the cliff, and all four animals were killed.

It is not my intention to multiply instances of this kind, but to use them as introductory to a short account of a hunt replete with dangers.

Though several days ago the thaw set the low-lands free from snow, winter's grip had not relaxed to any great extent among the mountain-tops. Of course, after each day's brief spell of sunshine, the gray grass patches along the lower edge of the white grew wider and more numerous ; but every night, under a cold blue sky, the frost again gripped the pure surface and postponed the thaw. It is customary for hounds to stay for one week each season in our fox-haunted dale, and, as our watchword is 'destruction,' the pack is out on every possible occasion. Days when the ground is almost as hard as a turnpike are seized upon, while to hunt with damp mist-folds dragging low upon the uplands is but usual. The fells fox-hound is a splendid animal, hunting well-nigh impossible scents over grounds bristling with rocks and scree, and over wide stretches of bogs.

The huntsman's horn, resounding through the crisp night air, roused the inhabitants of our farm. It was, we knew, but a signal to be astir. The sky was clear when we went out of the farmyard *en route* for Gurnald Crags, where a certain amount of earth-stopping remained to be done. Arrived at the foot of the long, splintered series of crags,

we sought out the fox-holes, and piled slabs of snowy rock to prevent any animal gaining cover. Then we walked to a shoulder of the hill which commanded a view of the Darren Head farms. The light was improving, and ere long we saw the hounds coming out attended by several men ; from this height and distance they were almost too insignificant to be perceived individually. The pack would endeavour to intercept foxes returning from their wanderings. It was bitter work waiting on that craggy brae, where every crevice was choked with frozen snow and where a cold breeze circulated.

After a while we heard a distant cry, followed by a rattling chorus. The shepherds opined that the scent was that of a fox which domiciled in some distant part of the dalehead. If this were so, then Gurnald Crags would not be visited, and the hunting would not come into view from our present situation. Therefore, they decided to go up the hill and watch the hunt pass along the smooth hillocks beyond. The approach to the summit was by a narrow gully between steep rocks, the bed masked by a deep snowdrift. Up this we scrambled, sliding, as it seemed, as far back between steps as we had advanced ; but in a few minutes we faced the last difficult portion. This was terrific. With faces pressed against the frozen

drift we kicked footholds ; but at every attempt the overhanging snow beat us, and down we slid, losing all we had gained. The shepherds held that we were within a few yards of the top of the gully, and that with perseverance we must succeed. The rocks bounding the ghyll were barely scalable. For some distance the holds were practicable, then I was stopped ; above, not a vestige of grip for foot or hand was visible. A shepherd ascended to my side, and with his powerful arms pushed me up the narrow gap between the rocks till I reached beyond the overhanging portion of snow. From this point I helped my *confrères*. The angle of ascent was still severe, but the occasional music of the hounds from the uplands put us on our mettle, and, slipping and plunging, we rapidly came up through the snow to the summit of the crags.

The acceleration of pace was timely ; hounds in full cry were issuing from a ghyll four hundred yards away, and we watched them sweep out on to the grass. The shepherds barely glanced at the pack, looking far ahead in the hope that from our coign of vantage we might descry the fox, and judge his direction of escape and probable tactics. Quite close to us, in the wilderness of hillocks, a fox was stealing across a breadth of snow. He had been on a wide circle, hoping thus to throw

off the hounds, but two of them seemed to have suspected this manœuvre. They were running wide when they viewed him, and with a wild yell they left the trail their kennel mates were puzzling out. 'He's in for Earnseat-earth,' called my comrades as they followed this hunt. But Earnseat-earth was blocked, and in a few minutes we, spent with running over rough boulders and through damp snow, heard the small chase passing deep beneath the crags on which we stood. The fox, baulked of escape, had doubled, and was making a bold bid to reach the holes we had stopped.

By this time the huntsman and his 'field' had joined us, and we all made down the slope towards the course the hounds were taking. The danger of this proceeding was manifest in a few seconds. I slipped and slid some thirty feet down the drift, only saving myself from a fall over the narrow ledge by clutching a comrade as I passed. Men were losing their footing on all sides, but the climax of this foolhardy journey was reached when one young man missed his hold as he was crossing the head of a ghyll. I was in front, and, hearing the wild cry and rush of falling snow, returned to see what was the matter. Cautiously looking down—for the drift was very loose—I saw the youth lying on the snow some forty feet below. At once the chase through the snow-choked crags

was abandoned by the humans. The huntsman and two shepherds descended the dangerous ravine to reach their injured friend most quickly ; we others sought a less perilous route. In five minutes we were standing by the prostrate youth, much relieved, indeed, to find that his injuries were confined to a severe shock. The remnant of the day was spent in collecting hounds ; the pack had split into a dozen clusters, each working a distinct trail. I quite anticipated that we would find several of the wanderers crag-fast, but fortunately this was not so. One or two were suffering from falls, but nothing serious was amiss with any.

CHAPTER XXII

SHEPHERDING ON THE FELLS IN WINTER

The hours immediately preceding a severe snow-storm, when the leaden, lowering sky presages an evil time, are busy ones with the shepherd on the fells. Daily, whatever the weather, he has been compelled to court the pastures of the uplands so that his flocks may as long as possible subsist on the scanty herbage remaining there. On our northern fells the shepherd's chief winter duty is to 'look' his sheep—that is, to patrol the wild heafs, and see that none of his animals are suffering from accident or ailment, counting them meanwhile, and watching keenly to detect truants, both to and from his flock. His charge is scattered over a wide area when the first signs of storm appear, and he has to collect them as quickly as possible and drive them to some selected portion whence they will not be inclined to ramble, and where there is little danger of their being overwhelmed in the tremendous drifts which are blown together. From the

very highest ground the sheep have been withdrawn long ago. The Thorns intake is not one of the most exposed.

We had climbed the mountains bounding our dale, and were retreating before the wild, threatening sky when we saw far beneath the Thorns shepherd collecting his flock from the wide heaf extending upwards from the head of the pass. Though the shepherd was working his hardest, it was clear that he could not complete his task before the storm broke. Every gully was cleared at the greatest possible speed, his dogs racing round the flanks of the wide breast of sheep, hunting laggards out from various shelters by boulder and ghyll, and driving the whole helter-skelter toward the centre. As we ran along rock-strewn High Crag End, we saw across the narrow glen other shepherds, frantically working to get their flocks also to shelter. A slight squall —forerunner of the storm—struck us as we plunged down towards the Thorns enclosure, and then the force of the wind for a few minutes abated, dying away in a moan along the grassy slopes. As the shepherd redoubled his exertions in this momentary lull, the air darkened. It seemed, indeed, that the leaden vault dropped down, enveloping us and blotting out the dull light of the January day. There was a distant

wailing and booming. The nearing blast was fretting with its enormous strength among the rugged crags high above our heads.

In deepening gloom we pushed on. At the Thorns enclosure we found that the dogs had, in almost total darkness, completed their task, and were now hurrying in the last of the dazed sheep. Jack, the shepherd, stood at the gateway, and counted them as they passed to safety. This small, marshy basin at the head of the dale, sheltered somewhat from the wildest gales by an almost semicircular scaur, was where, for many generations, the Thorns sheep had been driven upon the approach of a storm. As we groped our way down the hillside, the shepherd told us that but few fleeces were missing from his flock. The storm's first fury now broke around us, and, with pitiful bleatings, the sheep, crowded into the circumscribed area within our ken, lay down with their backs turned to the white-laden blast. In this position they would remain till the storm had passed, whether it lasted for one day or seven, whether they were on the exposed upland with the gale's worst gusts screeching around them, or in the ghylls with drift forming a hundred feet deep above them. About an hour later we reached home. During the long evening our shepherd braved the storm to go through the

dalehead and find whether every shepherd belonging to our fell had yet come in from his day's toil. In three hours he returned with the news that all were safe.

With fears thus set at rest, we were able to sit down to listen to the old farmer's stories of danger and heroism, in times old and new, faced by those who gain their livings on the stormy mountains. He told of many hairbreadth escapes, and a few fatalities. One was particularly tragic. At the head of one of the smaller valleys near this is a ruined cottage, at one time tenanted by the shepherd to the largest farm in the dale. One December morning, about the time of Waterloo, the shepherd started out to drive his flock some miles across the wastes. At noon a very heavy snowstorm came on, and just as the day was closing, the shepherd's wife heard dogs barking and sheep bleating at the gateway between the valley fields and the open fell. For a while she paid little attention to these sounds, thinking that her husband would open the wicket and allow his flock to pass through. As time went on, and the sounds came no nearer, she felt that something was amiss, and, wrapping her shawl about her, went out to the gate herself. In the white whirl she saw sheep and dogs, but her husband was not with them. Guided by the dogs, she ventured

far into the fearful storm till her strength gave out, and so exhausted was she that she barely dragged herself home to her five small children.

At this point the old man ceased his narrative, for over the wild thunderings of the gale rang the clamour of our dogs. The kitchen-door was opened wide, and in the fold, half blinded by the sudden glare in his face, stood the white-shrouded figure of a man. He walked wearily towards us, and half fell with fatigue as he crossed the threshold. A dozen hands were at work instantly stripping off his outer garments, when one of our men recognised him as a shepherd belonging to Moresdale. 'How came you here?' was the question. 'Are you alone?' Half dazed by the sudden transference from griping cold to genial warmth, the man did not for a few moments answer. Then he related how at dawning he had set off to bring down his sheep; how, when his work was almost through, the storm had burst; how he tried in vain to get down to the farms; and how, in the darkness, he missed even his dogs. After this, gradually losing strength, he had ploughed for hours through the raging storm. Once he came to where a cliff fell steeply away. Again and again he had reached wire fences, and followed them awhile, only to lose their guidance at some deep, wide drift. For at least an hour,

he thought, he had walked about a field near by, seeking to reach an illusory light. At last he heard our dogs bark. Such an incident is not a rare one among the stormy fells, and the presence of one who had so narrowly escaped death gave the more zest to the sequel of the old man's tale, which continued thus :

The storm raged unabated in violence for a week, when the widow—for thus she now was—managed to force her way to the nearest farmhouse (some four miles away), and raise the alarm. In an hour every man in the countryside was afoot, and, guided by the shepherd's own dogs, the body was soon found. In crossing a narrow, steep ghyll it seemed that he had missed his footing on the snow, and in the fall his head had struck against a protruding rock. To the insensibility thus caused had gradually succeeded the inertia of severe cold, and, without a struggle, the man's life had ebbed away.

Other stories were less melancholy, and some of the escapes were almost miraculous. After a long life as a shepherd, the narrator regarded the danger of his calling as not so much from the stress of weather in itself as from the defacing, by snow and cloud, of familiar landmarks, in the absence of which the wanderer may easily come into serious danger.

All night the snow fell ; before daybreak the white flakes ceased for a while, and this cessation was not complete before the whole household was astir, and we turned out to view the dale in its new garb. A full moon was riding majestically in the cold blue sky, from which a million stars twinkled. Our host, however, would not suffer the shepherd to venture out to his distant flock, and his weatherwise caution was almost immediately justified by the appearance in the south-west of more snow-clouds. The lull in the storm lasted but an hour, and only to break out more fiercely than before. It was not till thirty hours later that it became possible to give adequate attention to the sheep on the fells. Thrice in the meantime had a temporary cessation of the storm been seized upon as an opportunity to survey the ewes in the low-lying pastures near the homestead. After one of these patrols the shepherd reported five of their number missing, and also that the gale was piling a huge drift level with the fence at the lower corner of the field. The dogs were brought out, and, just as the white blast again seethed up the dale, we began to locate the missing animals. The snow was not yet crusted with frost, and at every step we sank deep into the powdery mass ; but the collies, though floundering up to the hips at every moment, could still scent the buried sheep. The gale had now

become so furious that the topmost layers of snow were being swept down into our excavation almost as fast as our spades could throw them out. We gained some relief by building up a parapet of the harder snow to windward, adding to our defences as the continual silting up made necessary. The drift was only some eight feet deep, and one or two of the sheep were not buried to any great depth, so after an hour's hard struggle, during which the storm seemed more than once likely to add to its prisoners by burying men, dogs, and all in the common heap, the victory lay with us, and the five ewes were driven back, protesting, to the higher and safer ground. In the teeth of the blast we pushed knee-deep through the snow back to the homestead. At noon on the third day the heavy clouds cleared, and the pale chill sunshine gleamed over hillsides, coppices, and fields clogged with snow, while a frosty silence brooded forlornly over all, as it seemed to ears almost deafened by the thundering onslaughts of the gale.

Then, through the deep drifts and across tracts from which the wind had swept the snow, five of us, spade on shoulder and dogs trotting patiently at heel, made our way towards the Thorns high intake, where our flock should be. We had hopes that our own task would be a light one. When struck by a storm it is the habit of sheep, as one

may say, to grin and bear it ; but immediately calm follows the stress, it is equally sheep-like to be up and away as rapidly as legs can go. To what remote places a sheep may get after a snow-storm can be imagined when it is stated that in the dozen miles between the Thorns enclosure and Helvellyn there are not more than seven fences, each of which can be passed at a score of points after a heavy fall.

For rapid progress taking a route under High Crag End, where wide stretches of rock and grass had been blown clear of snow, we soon reached our enclosure. Many sheep were wandering about in a dazed fashion, digging deep furrows into the snow in search of something eatable ; now and again one would stop in its work, and, looking askance around, from the bleak snowclad hillocks to the forbidding white mountain barrier, and, higher, to the cheerless blue sky, give forth a wild, pitiful bleating, in which one comrade after another would join till the still air rang to the echoing plaint. Very quickly, as he stalked about the enclosure, the shepherd counted his flock, announcing finally that only some six in all were missing. 'I saw two or three white faces in the beck-side before we left,' he said, and, as this and and all other gullies and inequalities of the great moor, was drifted level, we knew at once that

digging must be resorted to. At a word the dogs raced along in front, quartering the glistening surface thoroughly. First one, then another, stopped and began to scratch frantically at the drift. 'They'll be here,' said the shepherd, and, stepping back a few feet, we began to dig. After a few minutes' hard work the first sheep was released, and was driven by the dogs to its comrades; three others, who seemed none the worse for their fifty hours' imprisonment, were reached by a short passage; the rest were much more difficult to get at. At the outset of the storm they had sheltered under the lee of a crag in the ghyll-side, and the whirlwinds of snow had filled the hollow to the brim, arching over the streamlet. In the absence of the shepherd, who was examining a lame sheep, we began to dig down at a few feet from the damp breath-patches which, in striking contrast to the frost-spangled surface, show pretty closely the whereabouts of a missing sheep. Our pit had got fairly deep when, on our leading spadesman stepping into it, there was a sudden creaking and rending of snow, and down he went clean out of sight. We had dug into the natural arch over the waterway at its thinnest part, and our friend was precipitated some twelve feet into the broth the tiny brook was carrying down. We drew him up at once, but his clothes were

soaking, and, for his health's sake, we sent him at a trot back to the Thorns. Wiser by this mishap, we set to work again, and, with the aid of the shepherd, in time exhumed the other two sheep. One of these was almost dead with cold, its lair having been so near the beck-side that when the stream became swollen with melting snow the rising waters had reached it and soaked its fleece. Imprisoned so closely, there is no doubt that had it been left until the thaw really began it would have been suffocated—a common fate in such positions.

The sheep on our own immediate domain attended to, and our fence re-erected where the pressure of the wind had torn it from its slender foundations, we walked across to the Kirt Crag allotments. Here the shepherd had been forced to abandon his flock in a deep glen surrounded by rough crags. Jacob Manners was a master in his craft, and that he, too, should have been overwhelmed excused everyone else. We got to the ghyll just as daylight began to fade, and seeing that the buried sheep would take no harm from a few hours' delay, and, moreover, that the glaring, smoky sunset threatened a return of yesterday's horrors, nothing was done, save to drive to the security of the fold such sheep as were wandering about on the fellside.

While we were thus employed, word was

brought that Will, the shepherd of the Hollins, was missing. He had ventured out several hours ago in the last temporary lull of the storm to go round a portion of his fell, arranging that his comrade should take the other part. Wilson came back safe and sound, but Will he had not met since they parted, and he confessed to having, in the recurrence of the storm, completely lost his way. At dawn, after a perilous tramp by a cliff-edge, he was thankful indeed to see the lights of the farmhouse beneath, and to make his way home. The news had spread far in a short hour ; every dog and man in the dalehead was already in requisition, and we hastened to take our place on the Hollins heaf. The patrol swung out along the drifts, here and there stopping to exhume what the infallible instinct of the dogs indicated—in every case a sheep. Two hours passed ; daylight was succeeded by moonlight ; we were fighting against time, and every second was precious. Then the still air was rent with a wild yell of relief ; for, supported by a young shepherd from Mid Stang, Will was seen limping along the fell towards us. His story was brief. After reaching the point arranged as a rendezvous with his comrade, and not seeing that worthy, he had essayed to complete the round of the fell, despite the terrific storm, fearing that some accident had

befallen Wilson. He had almost reached the most distant corner of the heaf, when, in crossing a slippery crag-bed, he had fallen, catching his leg in a cranny of the rock, and so twisting his knee that further progress was almost impossible. For a few minutes he had sat facing the awful prospect of a lingering death from exposure, then recollecting that, some half-mile away, across very open, rocky ground, there was a rudely built hut in the next heaf, he had painfully essayed to make his way there. The journey took him over an hour in his numbed and lame condition. Even in the shelter of the hut the bitter cold racked his limbs, adding torment to his injury; and, as he truly averred, had he not lain between his dogs and encouraged them to nestle close to him, he would assuredly have been frozen to death ere the Mid Stang shepherd visited the hut. The last-named claimed no credit for his timely appearance; by lucky neglect he had put some necessary in the hut, and he had left our band of searchers to get it. Yet the incident, closing with good fortune, almost became a tragedy to the injured shepherd, and was a striking instance of the peril these men have often to face in their daily work.

Day after day we now went on to the fells. Jack, the shepherd, looked to his sheep, and then joined us in assisting Jacob to disentomb his flock,

which numbered a thousand. Five hundred of these, who had escaped the drifts, were folded on the day that the storm ceased. On the next day, over two hundred were brought in, and on the third day nearly the same number. These sheep had been buried six feet, from which depth the breath-marks on the snow-crust are plainly visible. Each day the depth to be probed increased, and, of course, the number of sheep released became correspondingly less. On the ninth day, my comrades and myself drove a tunnel into a big drift piled against the craggiest part of the hillside. Instead of digging straight down, we took the drift lengthwise, and, gradually sinking deeper, came to the level on which the sheep were. At the outset our proceedings were much hampered by the caving in of the walls and roof of the tunnel, and on one occasion we had to combine with those in the open to dig a way out again. Deeper down we found the snow packed denser, and thus safer to deal with. Space does not permit the description of every incident, but by this method we came within reach of some two-score sheep. These, though buried so long, were quite lively, for, when the last piece of snow was removed, they scurried down the gloomy passage and into the clear, biting air at full speed.

When I looked at the glen in which Jacob

Manners' flock had been overwhelmed, and saw the huge masses of snow banked up against the crags, I thought that from this place surely would the last of the buried sheep be released, but I was mistaken. Forty-one days after the storm sirens had screamed their last defiance from the uplands, in wandering through the dale my eye was attracted by some men moving about the edges of a narrow chine, or rift in the rock, through which a stream descended from the moor. To half its depth this was still filled with snow, the last patch of white remaining near our dale. Scrambling through a coppice, we reached a green sledge-road which carried us to where the shepherds had congregated. They were consulting how to dig through the drift in which the dogs had located three distinct breathing-places, though on the thaw-grimed surface none of these were visible to us. The mass of snow was not very great, but there was reason to fear that a large piece of superincumbent cliff had broken from its base and was being held in position by the drift. Of course, if much of this were excavated, there was no saying how many yards of the ravine might not fall in upon the workers. The council was divided ; some were for waiting the general thaw and sacrificing the sheep, others for their rescue and risking the fall of a thousand tons of rock in

the attempt; and the latter opinion prevailed. Starting at the lower edge of the drift, the small aperture of the waterway was enlarged to admit a man stooping. As he cut his way further in, another was posted to throw back the material the first loosened. We were fortunate enough to get an early place among the workers, and ere long were hewing out blocks of wet snow to ease our leader. The dogs, however, when taken into the tunnel, found the scent bad, and the reason was soon made plain. Striking forward and upward with the pick, loose stones of various sizes were encountered, showing that there had been a considerable landslip either during or immediately after the storm. In front our progress was now stopped by a large boulder lying right athwart our path. We gave up all hope of success; the situation was mightily unsafe, since at any moment the loosened crags above might crash down upon and bury us in our tunnel; but our leader, after ascertaining the extent of the obstruction, daringly decided to go ahead. The tunnel was accordingly driven over the stone. Old Towler, here brought in, gave us the first welcome signs of approach to our search, and like moles we burrowed ahead, sadly troubling the men behind to keep the tunnel clear of our dislodged snow. At last, after a feverish spell of

work, a hardened mass of snow was encountered ; the keen shepherd ran his spade round and separated it, disclosing a sheep—but what a sheep! Words cannot describe its appearance, but memory can never forget the glazed, sightless eyes, the mouth feebly opening and closing, but giving forth no sound. Vitality was restored by aid of stimulants, and the emaciated animal was carried down to the nearest farm. The other two sheep were reached about an hour later ; they had been buried next the foot of the sheer rock, and had, in their hunger, sucked up every particle of soil within reach, and even licked the living rock in order to gain some slight relief.

Our task being ended, we left the dark tunnel safely. The splintered rock which had so nearly daunted us came down when the first flood of spring thawed the last sheet of ice beneath its loosened base.

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER MOUNTAIN HARES

Mountain hare hunting is not so favourite a sport among our shepherds as the chase of the fox, chiefly, maybe, because the slaughter of Reynard usually removes a ban of terror from the dale. The men are every day brought face to face with the redskin's destructive habits, while the hare, sitting quietly in her form of tangled dead grass, is hardly noticed. Also, puss does not frequent the great scaurs and lonely elevations the fox invariably ranges over; therefore the hunting has much less of danger and romance.

As we rambled up the long hause, a hound gave voice behind; the huntsman and his coupled harriers were coming up the lower part of the ascent, and, knowing they were bound for our dale, we awaited their coming. Dusk was fast falling around; in the distant west floated a few illumined clouds, but the rest of the sky was of the gray-blue, portending a night of clear,

frosty starlight. Across the narrowing glen, the Witch's Lair, a curiously shaped collection of crag and cliff, sheered above a dun-coloured beard of boulders and of scree. Deep below the mountain torrent roared defiance to the stream brawling from the deep confines of Far Easedale. Behind us Seat Sandal rose to unseen heights, its slopes furrowed by the courses of many foaming rivulets. For the past three weeks rainstorms had raged, and there were now abundant signs of that soaking drab succession of hillsides which render winter in these wilder portions of Lakeland almost unbearable. The veteran huntsman is a rather thin but very alert and muscular man; his hearty laugh and sun-tanned face mark him for one who spends much of his life in the free-circulating air of the fells. His home is at the head of Kirkstone Pass—

> 'A barren place, and wild,
> Where naked cliffs are rudely piled.'

His tales of sport and wild weather on the mountains were vastly entertaining; the miles slipped past unheeded.

Next morning we were aroused betimes, and the survey from our bedroom windows proved that at last we were to have a fair day. The night had certainly promised good things; but

how many times during the past weeks had these same signs deluded us! Breakfast speedily over, bread and cheese pocketed, we dashed off to the inn where pack and huntsman had stayed. Anthony was out as we came along the road. 'Nay, there'll be no hunting as lang as t' rag (hoarfrost) hods.' So we had to content ourselves for an hour or so with examining the hounds, hearing of their lineage and prowess. Some were bold, sniffing curiously about our legs as we stood in the outhouse, while the only sign of others was the sheen of green eyes from the farthest corner of the hovel. 'Hector, Hector!' called the veteran huntsman outdoors; the hound swung out and, squatting, held up a paw for inspection. Poor old Hector's forefoot had often been injured, and he knew what was required of him. However, the member was this morning pronounced fit, and the hound took his place in the ranks. When the sunshine had been streaming into the valley for some time, the huntsman called up his pack, and started off. At first he kept to the roadway, much to the chagrin of his canine following, who were plainly yearning to feel the short grass of the moorland beneath them.

At last Anthony reached his destination. The grass was quite dry, the frost particles had entirely disappeared, and this wide upland pasture

seemed to promise hares in plenty. In a very short time the pack had spread itself, and a line was found. Ranter's whimper developed in a flash into a triumphant note, and away he went, his comrades picking up the scent in splendid style. Over the wall the dappled crowd of almost silent harriers disappeared, and a few seconds later whirled out of sight over a gorse-grown height. We got past this, and round the corner of a crag, where rock was intersected with narrow patches of grass, to where the shelving hill-side opened into a tiny hollow—a bog bounded by a fringe of wild cotton-grass and reeds. The porous moss threw up fountains of muddy water at every stride; our boots were soon soaking, and a score of tiny rivulets were running from our stockings; but in the excitement of the chase this mattered nothing. On and on, threading through boulders, leaping here and there particularly rough places, only to come up with the pack, checked by the side of a watercourse. The hare, in crossing this, seemed to have overleapt herself, landing in a deep pool. When she emerged, her dripping coat had destroyed the scent for her pursuers. Some of the hounds were standing, staring alternately at each other and at us, while the less despairing roamed the hillside for further trace of their quarry. Though the run had not been

a long one, we mere humans were glad of a rest, after which Anthony led the way along the slope. Nothing, however, was to be found on these higher levels, so the word was given to get down to some established 'smoots' in the dalehead. We were in the throes of a struggle with the hog-wire (stretched above every wall on the fells to prevent the sheep breaking ground) when a hare sprang from a tangle of grass not twenty yards away. Ruby was the only hound on the wall at the moment, and in his haste he came tumbling over the entanglement, rolling some yards down the sloping field before he could regain his feet. The hare, profiting by this slight mishap, bounded away with tremendous leaps, and Ruby ran magnificently—his even action and great speed showing to advantage. It was hardly ten seconds before the pair were out of sight and the rest of the pack toppling over the wall. We ran along the hillside to a crag, from which we saw the finish of the incident; Ruby, far in front of his comrades, ran into and killed his chase. The sun was now quite warm, and, 'In to the Raise!' cried Anthony. There used to be a cunning hare here which for seasons beat all hounds, and the veteran had hopes of meeting it again to-day. The pack got on to a line almost before the jaws of the pass were reached, and from a vantage point we watched

them sweep into the hollow way, their cries rolling up to us in echoing confusion. It was possible for us here to climb some distance up Steel Fell, and watch without fatigue the whole of the hunting. The pack raced across the gray hillside, paused at the fences, disappeared wholly from view in the deeper, wider ghylls, and in a few seconds the loud 'view' broke from a score of canine throats. For awhile even yet we could not see the hare, so closely did its colour conform to its surroundings; but just before the pack closed in, its gray-brown body showed in crossing a moraine of stones. To the finish everything was now in full view. Puss squatted suddenly in an almost inappreciable declivity when the leading hound had almost reached her, then leapt up again, after evading his attack, and, with the pack swirling round her, she made a game attempt to break away, bounding clean over a few of the harriers close at hand. She was tossing about for a few seconds like a stick in the eddy of a waterfall, then disappeared in a whirlpool of black and tan and white.

After a scene like this, enacted almost perpendicularly beneath our feet, we determined to take more active share in the hunt. Accordingly, we dropped down the rugged slope to the veteran huntsman, who had been quite close to

the point where the 'kill' had occurred. He advised us not to try to keep on terms with the pack in its tremendous bursts; for as hares invariably, when pursued, run in a rude circle, by a little judgment a good part of the chase could be witnessed. Not caring to trust to our own ideas, however, we attended the veteran as closely as possible. The pack scoured the rough mountain pastures to Raise Bridge on the Steel Fell side of the dale without success; then, just as we were turning to try the side of Seat Sandal, a hare jumped up, almost from the caërn of 'him who sleeps on Dunmail Raise.' The harriers were across the brawling stream in a moment, and lacing along the tussocky grass in pursuit. We got on to the road, and ran as quickly as possible, but it was all over long before we caught up the hounds; in some mysterious manner the hare had eluded pursuit at the mount of a rocky ghyll.

In a few minutes we were refreshed enough to take the fell again. We began by driving across a few fields unsuccessfully, then a drag was picked up, and the pack bolted away up the hill. 'Get along to Birk Side Ghyll!' roared Anthony, as he set the example. We glanced up: hounds were climbing out of sight; a few men were running at a high level. The veteran, however, gained pace at every stride, and taxed our more youthful

limbs to the utmost. He strode through clinging moss-bogs and across a score rivulets with ease, swung over a wall with celerity, despite the ugly hog-wire, and plunged into the bracken-beds. Beyond these was a wide stretch of scree, over which, his heavily-nailed boots grinding fire at almost every stride, he ran as through so much sand. The climax was reached when the sound of hounds came from ahead, apparently coming down the next ghyll. 'Come on!' called the old man, leaping down the breakneck incline, crossing by the boulders the roaring streamlet, and climbing on hands and knees the bluff beyond. We did our utmost, but experience tells. After running hard, we reached the ghyll in time to see the hare dash down a grass tract a score yards away, with hounds close up. The frightened animal progressed by enormous bounds; but its strength was failing, and the yelling horde was close behind. An outcrop in the fellside prevented our seeing the conclusion of the chase, and when we got down to the point hardly a trace of the 'kill' remained. We continued along the slope toward Helvellyn, but no further luck came our way. There were innumerable short dashes, but on every occasion the odds were in favour of the hare. Once, in crossing a watercourse, we missed our footing on a slippery rock, and rolled down into a deep pool,

completely drenching ourselves. At another point we had to rescue a sheep, which, terrified by the presence of the hounds, dashed into a flooded stream, and was carried over a waterfall, to kick madly about in the deep basin below. The end of the hunting came, so far as we were concerned, when old Hector, leaping among some boulders, sprained his foot badly. We took the poor, whimpering animal down to the inn to await his master. Though we had a mile to go, and much of that over very rough ground, the stout old boy would have no help save in the crossing of walls. As we bedded him down he looked up as though to say: 'Ah, well, it's painful, but I had some splendid times before this happened.'

CHAPTER XXIV

A WINTRY NIGHT ON THE FELLS

Day after day for a week the weather held fine, and night after night the cloudcap, settling on the higher ridges, threw freezing white folds far down the snowy slopes. One night the thermometer fell to zero in the valleys. Wild-duck, heron, curlew, and the like, driven by this severity from a thousand reedy swamps and tiny meres, crowded down to larger but not less solitary waters. We had walked far through the frost and snowbound countrysides. As the sun sank, the gray haze on the western horizon flushed to fiery crimson for a while, then gradually lost radiance and returned to its former ashen hue. Already in the darkening east a few stars showed weak and distant gleams. Supper was served at nine, and shortly afterwards we turned out for a night's sojourn among the silent, frozen wastes beyond the valley.

The night was propitious; a full moon flooded the mountains with bright, uncertain splendour;

the air was keen ; the intakes knee-deep in snow, every irregularity hidden by drifts ; a faint breeze stirred the alders by the beck-side ; an owl called across the white and silent dale. As we rose higher, the glen closed in till only the narrow way remained, and this ended abruptly by the foot of a wall of ice-plated rocks, down which a thin stream gurgled. Up this obstacle we cautiously scrambled, and by the time it was cleared we were quite ready for a rest. Then, sitting down on a rounded snow hummock, we tried to comprehend the widened view. Only Thomson, in his highest poetic flights, has endeavoured to fit words to such a scene :

> 'A bleak expanse,
> Shagg'd o'er with wavy rocks, cheerless and void.'

Away to the south-west stretched a wintry waste, in summer a realm of proud, green woodland, rich pasture, and smiling cornfields ; and further away came the dark sands of an estuary and the moonlit sea.

After a short survey we pushed on through the thick snow. As anticipated, the first pool was completely frozen and tenantless. Across it we reached a deep gully, up which a path threaded between cliff and stream. In the semi-darkness only slippery footholds could be found, and more than once we were near sliding down into the whirl-

ing waters. Emerging from this ghyll, we were near a wide basin of moorland. Travelling became difficult, for no matter how carefully we selected our way across the evenspread mantle, we were sure to plunge into some deep-buried bed of heather, where we almost stuck fast. In a while, however, we seemed to light upon opener ground, and proceeded more easily. Two tiny streams ran through this hollow, their courses marking the way to different springs in the fell far above. One of these rivulets we had passed already ; the dark line of the other was close in front. A sound of slow, laborious wing-beats rustles from the narrow waterside a dozen yards above, and, unperceived before,

> 'A heron, as resounds the trodden shore,
> Shoots upward, darting his long neck before.'

A few yards more brought us to a wall, beyond which a path led to the next and larger tarn, where we had hopes of meeting with wildfowl.

My companion, dead to all discomfort, left the path after we had descended a short way, and waded across several wide drifts, hoping thereby to approach the waterside unobserved. As the edge of the hill was neared, we had to take increasing care in our movements. Working through freezing snow over the skyline, we got

to the shelter of a parallel drift, then crawled on hands and knees towards a bay where remained open water. Three brace of duck were clearly visible, disporting themselves among the rattling reeds and by the frozen shore. My companion crept nearer to get a shot. The duck, startled by a sudden movement among the snow, rose. Two shots rang out almost simultaneously, the sound rattling along the wide expanse of ice, and dying away in echoes among the sloping snowfields. My friend plunged into the thick cloud of snow-dust raised by his discharge, and by the time I reached the water's edge he had retrieved the two dead birds. The others, with wild cries, were winging away to the south-west.

For an hour we ploughed across the moor, avoiding the greater drifts, ever climbing higher, till we approached a knoll marking the edge of the watershed. I was the first to reach this point, and stood a moment to enjoy the view. The moon was now high ; to the north a mist-cap hid a lofty mountain group, and between the snow-covered bluffs to the south-west was a distant vista of lowlands to the sea. Otherwise, all was a dreary succession of whitened ridges, save where at last the eye was caught by a steely gleam, wholly unlike the prevailing frost shimmer. There, deep beneath and almost hidden by a pro-

jecting breast of the hill we stood upon, was the tarn of our quest.

Instantly we began to make down to it, for by its shore stood a rough but sound hut, where we could make a fire and prepare much-needed food. But on such a breakneck slope, where thick drifts mask the roughness of the ground, haste is absolutely dangerous. After a few minutes' tumbling among the snow-wreaths, we found a tolerably smooth tongue, and down this we slid, walked, or rolled, as the deceptive surface gave or disappointed us of foothold. At the foot of this hillside we emerged into some terrible beds of boulders, to pass which tired us considerably. For awhile we had lost all sight of the tarn, but now, as we cleared the rugged ground, it again appeared, deep beneath, and apparently as far off as ever. As we worked slowly down the declivity the going became smoother, the hidden scree and boulders less numerous. A tiny dell opened up in the descent, and I whispered to my friend: 'Here's for snipe.' He was incredulous, but I knew, from the dark patches showing around, that deep-seated springs still defied frost and snow. As we were passing, surely, a brace of snipe drummed up from the nearest bog, getting well out of range before a shot could be fired.

At half-past one we reached the tarn-side, quite

close to the shelter, where the previous day a skating-party had left ample provision in anticipation of our visit. With spruce 'brogs' we soon made a roaring fire and prepared coffee. After a rest, my companion remembered that he had seen a good many duck at times on a water across the moor, and, in the hope of bagging one or two, he proposed to visit this. I was not keen to go floundering, face downwards, and at a snail's pace, through an indefinite number of wide, clinging snow-drifts, but he urged that, by ascending a short glen at the head of this mere, the discomfort would be considerably lessened. We crossed the clear ice to the reed-beds, and had hardly stepped ashore before, with a tremendous roar of wings, a small flock of wild-duck rose. My friend's two discharges were quite ineffective, he not expecting anything here and his fingers being numbed by the intense cold.

To avoid a heather tangle, we turned up the slope toward a swamp whence a strong stream ran down into the great tarn ; but, before proceeding far, we heard a good deal of wing-flapping and bird-clamour. We were indeed surprised to find, on the edge of the mossy surface, a large wild goose. Someone had laid a trap in this favourable corner, but the unauthorized fowler did not get the reward justly due to his knowledge, for we

despatched the goose and took it with us. As we cleared the tiny hollow, my friend whispered that the tarn was now quite close, and we must be very careful. I crept forward through the chill drift to a little fold on the hillside, and, peering over, saw the tarn. A tiny islet, crowned with growing willows, was divided from the surrounding white mantle by a canal of dark, gleaming water-streams from the unfreezable springs. Not far away, but directly opposite this open space—ordinarily the centre of the tarn—was a low, loose stone wall, from the shelter of which my companion hoped to get a good shot. He was crawling forward with this intent when a distant sound drew my attention, and ere long, to the eastward, a company of duck came into sight—some part of the migration which had been going on for days. A group detached themselves from the main body, and circled down toward the tiny open space in front; but two shots from the shelter of a snow-drift speedily scattered them, beside effectually rousing the other inmates of the basin. Though palpably exhausted, the descending duck got on the wing again, and made for less noisy shores. J. had fired at long range for a moonlight shot, and I was surprised to find that even one bird had been hard hit.

With curlew and plover springing upward on

every side, uttering shrill alarms, it was obviously no use thinking of finding more game here. The commotion would settle down in time, but it would be freezing work to lie in the drifts meanwhile. We accordingly returned to the larger tarn, and carefully reconnoitred its many bays and streamlets for further game; but this, though abundant enough, was wary, and did not permit us to get within range. At last, taking the gun in my own hands, and despatching my companion to raise the fire again in the hut, I struck up the nearest hillside, making a short détour in order to reach the head of a tiny ghyll. Descending into the depths of this, I tried to get down to the tarn-side again. The gully was simply paved with ice—springs dripping down the crags and from the long bunches of waterweed had frozen into solid masses, and the spray-washed rocks in the beck-course were impossible for foothold. By dint of much hard work, and with many a slip and stumble, I got down to the foot of the glen, as I hoped, unperceived. The tarn stretched before me at the distance of fifty yards. Taking the cover of an old sledge track, worn deep by occasional torrents, I crawled forward. From a bracken bed on my right came the sleepy sound of a cock grouse and his harem. I feared my approach had aroused these, and that I could get

no further without 'rising' them. As noiselessly as possible I worked round to get the gun free for a shot. There was a crackling sound rising from the farther edge of the bracken bed. What on earth—— Whirr-r! Up came the covey, clean away before my expectant muscles could prepare for the shot—away to the accompaniment of sharp snarling. A fox! I was on the alert at once, and peered over the edge of the hollow track. Bang! At the report Reynard turned and snapped at his flank, then dashed away. My other barrel, however, stopped him completely. This was some compensation for the loss of the finest drove of duck we had yet seen, now wheeling up from the reed-beds.

I tried to get another shot, but without avail; then, the chill of the intense frost racking my bones, decided to join my friend in the hut. A hot drink and some food so fortified us that we faced our hard tramp cheerfully, and at about five o'clock we started across the rolling white moor, reaching our starting-point in time to clear a hearty breakfast before 8 a.m.

Such a night—though to some minds, maybe, chill, fatiguing, and dreary—to us was a fine experience, and its successor is eagerly looked forward to.

CHAPTER XXV

BADGER WAYS

So shy and retiring in his habit of life is *Meles taxus* that few of his co-dwellers in rural England are really cognisant that so interesting a relic of a long-vanished fauna lives at close quarters with themselves. One who was a close and accurate observer of Nature confessed that twice daily for eight years he passed a small spinney (not more than sixty yards square) without being in the least aware that a badger's cete was situate within many miles. Yet year after year a family had been brought up within these narrow bounds, and successive generations had dispersed, silent and mysterious as the night, to establish homes elsewhere.

Years ago I heard this cited, and a keen desire to know whether the badger really existed in our dale—a place of precipices and moors, shady woods and marshy wastes—possessed me. The 'oldest inhabitants' to whom I referred denied all know-

ledge, adding that so large an animal could not exist in our neighbourhood without its presence being well known. This was not satisfying, so, reading where and what I could of the scant literature concerning the British badger's haunts and habits, I searched through a great many woods without success. My efforts were spurred when an ancient wanderer narrated to me that years previously the dwellers 'neath a huge limestone scaur a few miles away had found peculiar animal signs in the brakes and among the brambles trailing over the rugged braes. Next, a poacher lying at night by the covertside was greatly scared by the approach of what seemed in the uncertain light to be an animal 'larger than a sheep and heavily built, which gave out savage cries as it leapt along.' So horrified was the man that when the apparition had passed he bolted for home, leaving behind his valuable rabbit-nets. The report of this occurrence spread, and crimes innumerable and preposterous were alleged against the strange creature. At daybreak one morning there began the most remarkable hunt in the annals of the countryside, men and dogs pursuing they knew not what, for rumour gives strange names to mysteries. The scratch pack opened in the meadow where the animal had been most frequently located, and at once struck a huntable

scent. Into the near-by covert they dashed, scattering its denizens in all directions through a thick, tangled brake, then over the wall into the bracken-beds, where stout stems, sinewy tendrils, and spreading foliage conspired to trip and hinder. The chase had now reached the foot of the mountain, and the rising ground became rapidly more rugged. Up they poured, straining and climbing, to the scree-beds, where the sturdiest follower had perforce to pause, for the loose, sliding stones denied secure foothold, and the angle of ascent was severe. Thus, when the panting men reached the sheer rock, they found their collection of dogs rambling about aimlessly, though a bunch of the most determined, led by a wiry little terrier, were endeavouring vainly to scramble up a narrow cleft. Surely this marked the quarry's refuge, but so barren of foothold was the face of the cliff that nothing could win far upwards. The 'hold' must be assaulted from some other direction, and within a few minutes a ledge was found giving access to the desired gully, whence a narrow gap led into the bowels of the mountain. The tiny terrier-leader went to earth gaily. For a moment all unaccustomed to the 'subterranean chase' instinctively held their breath, then Dickie began to speak as he confronted the unseen occupier. A short, sharp

conflict ensued, yap and snarl, snarl and yap, punctuating a medley of strange cries. Then the thunder of underground movements came nearer, and, after a prodigious amount of pother, Dickie emerged side by side with a pied-faced, short-bodied creature, which he held gripped by the cheek. The terrier had apparently come on the badger at a very great disadvantage, for immediately the hole was cleared the troglodyte wrenched himself free, and again took refuge in the darkness. Before another attempt was made to draw the cete a bag and rope had to be procured. The badger's fortress took a long summer's day to reduce, and at the end only an accidental splintering of rock gave the humans victory. It is rather strange to hear that such a capture aroused great local curiosity, and that the landlord of a neighbouring hotel made a small fortune out of the unfortunate badger, which was baited almost daily, terriers being brought great distances to be pitted against it.

Records state that no badger had been seen or captured within the locality for at least half a century previous, and when last winter another was slain in a hen-roost a few miles away, reference was made back to the above as the only other authenticated instance of the badger being observed in the district. Yet at any time—within the past

ten years, at any rate—a close survey of the fir-woods clothing parts of the great limestone ridge would have revealed the domiciles of never fewer than four distinct families. In this neighbourhood the lines of the badger are gradually settling into pleasant places. The landed gentry, with falling rents, find it inexpedient to pour out money like water in stocking every acre of bleak upland with grouse, and consequently the unreasoning crusade against all animals and birds other than they has considerably abated in violence.

A few remarks concerning *Meles taxus's* life-history may not be uninteresting, though the present writer does not pretend to any knowledge beyond that picked up in casual outdoor observation.

In the first place, the badger does not really hibernate during winter. Invade his home during the most severe weather, and you will find him lively enough to maul severely any incautious terrier. Or glance at the entrance of any occupied earth while a fall of snow masks the ground, and you will see footprints emerging from and returning into his fortress. No other animal of the woodland leaves such prints. The badger is our only remaining plantigrade. His foot falls flatly, palm and toes equally pressed, and in the powdery snow his powerful claws leave

their impression. In our dales the badgers seem frequently to make new household arrangements after winter. One lot I knew of left their haunt to cross the dale, but more often old tunnels and entrances are discarded in favour of newly excavated ones. The badger can, and does, live for many days on end in his den without partaking of food. He can also live after burying himself completely, the excavations of his powerful forepaws being allowed, after being pushed back by his hindlegs, to so accumulate that all egress of air is completely cut off.

The year with the badger may be said to begin about March, when, at the approach of warm weather, the winter bed is brought out and rolled from the mouth of his home. It is at this period that the badger's domicile is least difficult to find, for the recently discharged masses of grass and bracken are easily noticeable to all who wander through the woodlands. Some of the bed is, of course, left, that the female may comfortably produce her young in April. With July the cubs have grown to a fair size ; the wild fruit season, the badger's feast, is commencing. During the short summer nights it is possible to watch the whole family come out of their cete to play and feed. The sight is interesting, but the midges make waiting almost intolerable. Realizing the

importance of silence to you, and that you dare make no defence, they swarm around, biting mercilessly. The only thing you can do to gain a moment's respite is to occasionally draw a hand from the cover of a pocket and to massacre the gluttons clinging to your face and neck. Of the badger's chief autumn operation an authority of a century ago states: 'It is very pleasant to behold them when they gather materials for their couch —as straw, leaves, moss, and such like—for with their feet and their head they will wrap as much together as a man will carry under his arm, and will make shift to get into their cells and couches.'

One day in September we were crossing a mountain path, from the summit of which an almost bird's-eye view of our countryside is obtained. We stood awhile contemplating the extended vista, then, nearer, we saw something moving in a stealthy, odd manner among the stones some three hundred yards below. The glasses were instantly turned in that direction, and the moving body resolved into a badger. Apparently it had winded us, or some other danger, for, bumping and bouncing among the boulders, it made off at a respectable speed. A few nights afterwards, cycling through the darkened dale, I distinctly saw in the flash of my lamp the familiar

pied face. With a half-bred collie which might be trusted to wind any four-footed game, we turned out early the following morning, and, after a roundabout hunt through woods and by marshes, across the very worst of moorland, we came under the brae where we had first observed the badger. The ground was exceedingly rough, but the collie drove rapidly and confidently towards the edge of a long series of crags, and, arriving there, turned down a narrow chine to the base. Here, after some dodging among the many boulders, the badger's haunt was found; a crack gave way a short distance into the cliff, then almost closed, leaving a narrow tunnel. The collie was scraping frantically at the entrance to this. The hole would have to be stormed with terriers, and in the whole dale I could not come across one suitable to go to earth. Some were too big, others too light, to tackle the badger with a chance of saving themselves from serious hurt. The postman had one of the right build, but he was a savage little scamp. For following the badger to earth successfully the terrier must be steady tempered, content to hamper his opponent, and, by keeping him on the alert, to prevent his digging away. A dog that will charge a badger in the gloomy recesses of his home is certain to be badly injured sooner or later, for the mode of attack confronted is not a usual

one. The badger bites upwards, getting his head low down, and presenting a portion of his anatomy to counter-attack which is practically invulnerable.

All during autumn I kept the badgers in mind, paying many visits to the earth. When December came and all was icebound, the blacksmith told me that he had just been given a terrier which seemed to answer my requirements, and that hire of another very similar was procurable for a day's hunt. At the back of the smithy I was introduced to a mild-looking fluffy yellow dog, which, however, seemed to possess some spirit. Bad weather prevented an attack being delivered on the badger's stronghold for some time, and when circumstances were at last propitious I was prevented from attending the final attack. The story I tell is, therefore, not a personal narration. The morning was frosty, and the dogs went right up to the mouth of the earth without giving a sign of the badger's presence. In our various visits I had found an additional hole which appeared to give access to the central chamber. One terrier was loosed into this, and the other into the chief tunnel. If the cetes proved to be distinct, one terrier was to be withdrawn, but after a few minutes the subterranean sounds proved that both dogs were converging on the same chamber. An expert badger-hunter, if betrayed so far, would

have here endeavoured to get one terrier out, but the blacksmith and his friends did not appreciate the situation. The noise underground gradually trended upward, and rapidly passed beyond the sphere of interference. The men went to the top of the crag, where the fight seemed to be quite close beneath. At this juncture the blacksmith's terrier came out for air, and was tied up. The underground campaign seemed to be carried on in one area, so digging operations were commenced. After about two hours' work the fray ceased, and the nearest spades redoubled their exertions, then in a minute a terrier's voice resounded again through the intervening layers of earth. The excitement grew as the sounds neared, and the last tunnel was cut into, to find that terrier barking and scraping furiously at the mouth of a tiny rabbit-hole. Where the badger had got to could not be guessed ; but doubtless, upon finding its aggressor's attention diverted, it had turned round, and, using its splendid digging weapons, rapidly placed itself beyond an impenetrable barrier of earth. Under such circumstances a badger may dig right up to the sward, and, breaking through, bump off unpursued to a less noisy neighbourhood.

The moral of this disappointing finish is obvious : Never keep a terrier which cares for aught else when a badger is being tackled.

To human as well as canine the hunting may be fraught with danger. When digging there is the possibility of your pit caving in, and also later, when you have cut across the last passage, and are within arm's length of your pursuit. The terrier is drawn aside, and, tongs in hand, you reach forward into the darkness. The moment the badger is free from its holder-up, it turns and begins to dig anew. Now is the time to seize it and draw it forth. A Welsh gamekeeper, at the conclusion of a badger chase, thought he saw the animal's tail. Reaching forward, he took hold and essayed to draw. But he had made a fearful mistake. Seized by the paw, the badger whisked sharply round and reached the man's wrist. For full ten minutes it held him with his arm outstretched, and when finally it released hold the man's hand was hanging by a few shreds only.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER SHEEP WORRIERS

One of the most anxious periods to the fells shepherd is a winter ushered in by severe storm. At such a time not only does he experience great difficulty in bringing down his flock from the higher ground, but one or more of the sheep are almost certain to be left behind. Some meet with death from starvation or accident, and a fine repast is spread for the natural scavengers of the fells—the fox and the raven kind. The sheep-dog also finds this plenteous food toothsome, and this trait gives the shepherd great trouble ; for once a dog tastes raw flesh, it will not hesitate to wantonly attack any stray sheep, and thus it becomes unreliable and useless for its life's work, besides being capable of committing great damage.

At such a period we were at a big sheep-farm in the dales. For more than a week there had been trouble among the dogs, for the taste for flesh seems contagious, and once it breaks out in a dale

no dog is secure. Every shepherd kept his dogs tied up even more than usual, frequently visiting them to see that none were at large ; yet no one, after all vigilance, could lay hands on the actual culprits. Just after eight o'clock on the morning of the third day, after a particularly heavy snow-storm, a shepherd from one of the higher farms came down, and said there had been another case of sheep-worrying, some three miles away up the ghyll, at the extreme head of the valley. When the man asked for a gun my friends possessed, I guessed that the trouble was to be ended that day if possible. When we reached Crag Farm, I found two more men handling ancient weapons, and about a score others. There was no doubting their earnestness in this matter ; some two dozen sheep had been killed or maimed during the present outbreak, and there was no guarantee whose flock would be attacked next.

At first we walked all together to the head of the intakes, but when the open fell was reached the party split, one section ploughing through the snow down to and across the stream, taking the opposite bank in their search. With us caution was the order ; no one was allowed to cross a sky-line unless the outlook had first been reconnoitred ; silence was maintained as far as possible, though our most guarded movement among the crunching,

yielding snow would be distinct to canine ears at an immense distance. After a while, the other party signalled from a commanding position that we might go quicker, as the ground in front was under their observation. We advanced, all except the gunners floundering through such drifts as could not be waded. These last had their weapons to consider, and to choke one of the ancient barrels with snow in an untoward movement meant one gun useless, and already we were none too well equipped in this matter.

Soon all stopped for a breather, and, recovering most rapidly, I climbed ahead. In a few minutes I came to a place where the wind had blown the snow away from the bracken-covered hillside, and then, stopping a moment to listen if the others were coming up—the slope was here too abrupt to see them—I saw a black-and-tan dog slinking away into a deep ghyll. Throwing caution to the winds, I dashed down to my companions, who received the report with some incredulity. I was impatient to follow the dog and have it shot, but the shepherds decided otherwise. A watch was to be placed on the glen, for sheep-worriers always hunt in couples, and the other would not be far away. We two who were appointed crawled forward as near to the edge of the declivity as possible, and finding a position from which we

could easily observe, we lay down in the drift and waited. Half frozen, hands and feet numbed, the chill striking the more deeply because of the sweat left from our previous exertions, words cannot describe the torture of the next twenty minutes. At the end of this period we heard a movement in the dark ghyll, and a collie came into view not thirty yards from us. Had I been mistaken? No; the dog which hid at my approach was much different to this. After a prolonged survey, the collie, a beautiful lemon-and-white, returned out of sight, and in a few minutes, plastered all over with snow, one of the gunners crawled down to our position. In whispers he told us that the others had seen a collie at a good distance above this ghyll, and had attempted to drive it to where the other had secreted. They were not sure of their success, as the animal had got out of their sight in a gully. Neither himself nor the other gunner had been able to get within shooting distance. I was told to go up the drift and give the others warning, and when at last my message was delivered there was a sigh of exultation. Frost-numbed extremities were forgotten, and the men ploughed through the knee-deep snow as eagerly as at the first drift we met. The dogs, it was hoped, were in a lethargic mood after a heavy meal off the dead sheep. I was told off to take

the river-bed in our advance, for both sections had now joined line, chiefly because my boots were fitted with ice-nails, and I was at least disadvantage among the slippery rocks. I did not like the job, especially when the particular portion of gully was approached into which the dogs had bolted. I remembered, to my increased alarm, that the guns to be used were rare scatterers of shot, and that some stray pellets might come my way, for it was certain that part of the battle would be fought out in the depths of this narrow pass. I cautiously scrambled down the rocky watercourse, keeping an ever-vigilant eye on the holes in the cliff which might harbour my quest, and following the speed of the men, who climbed along the precarious edge of the sheer descent in order to lessen my area of work. The stream gurgled among the rocks in a chilling manner ; every tuft of moss was covered with a sheet of ice, while long pendent icicles hung from the crags on either side, and had to be brushed aside or broken off at places in order to progress at all. Here and there I had to scramble round a deep basin, trusting for handhold to some jutting point hidden under six inches of cold, glistening white, while equally insecure footholds had to be forced. I was standing by a steep cascade, wondering how I was to get down and around the pool at its foot, when a

sound from above startled me. The collie had, unseen, crawled along a snow-ledge above my head. A sharp snarling bark tore the air as I struck in its direction, though it was high out of reach above. The shepherds on the other side the gully, not knowing I was near, the depth of the sheer cliffs being great, began to hurl masses of frozen snow, sticks, etc., at the dog, and so narrow was the rock chine that several of their missiles came within a trifle of hitting me as they rebounded from the rocks. The men across the ghyll immediately gave the alarm for my protection, and all combined to bawl down instructions and encouragement. I didn't like the position. What would happen if I dislodged the dog, and it came tumbling down into that narrow, ice-sheathed watercourse, where there was chance neither to fight or escape? The ledge on which he had taken refuge was so narrow that the collie could not turn to retreat, so there he stood at bay, snarling and barking every time I made a movement. Then a shepherd, descending some way by the slender trees fringing the abrupt side, passed down a gun, and, retiring, in a few seconds called me to fire. They did not care to fire down, being barely able to see the dog, and there being also grave possibility that a good part of the charge might ricochet from the cliff and hit me, as I

could not take cover. What a weight, and how clumsy the old weapon was! But I got it sighted on the collie's head as he leaned over to watch me, and pulled the trigger. I was trembling with cold and excitement, yet at so short a distance the mark could hardly be missed. Forward tumbled the yellow body; I did not see more for the blinding whirl of snow-dust following the discharge, but heard its heavy splash in the stream. For some three minutes the air was choking thick with white particles, then it began to clear. The dead collie was lying half in and half out of the water, blood oozing from the hole in its head. At such close quarters I was not surprised to note that half the skull, from nostril to ear, had been blown clean away. I was passing up the gun, when two shots rang up the fissure, but the result of these were misses. The tan had selected a point at which to break through the cordon of men with such sagacity that only comparatively long shots were possible. Before I got back to the level of the fell, having a considerable and difficult way to retrace, the shepherds were away on the trail, and I had to follow as rapidly as possible. In about half an hour I came up to them, halting on a wide snow expanse. The dog by some means had escaped them without leaving a coherent trail in the snow. The back trail was

resorted to, but soon a maze of marks were reached, and we could do nothing but stare stupidly at one another, while the dog was doubtless exulting in a safe retreat at no great distance. One of the older shepherds and myself were examining a likely-looking track among the rocks further up the stream, when a tiny ball of snow, about the size of a walnut, rolled down the almost precipitous bank. My companion looked up; then turned to me, saying: 'This track's no use. We'll see if the others have found anything.' When we had descended the gully a little way, he turned to me. 'Did you see old Nell up there among the alders?' I had not, but he had in that momentary glance. He sighed. 'That dog's my own; there isn't one in the dale can touch it for knowing and work.' Then: 'It'll be out of that as soon as we are clear away, and most likely make up into the fells.' Again sadly he said: 'That dog's my own—and I thought it was locked up with the others.' He did not return to where the others were still standing, but led the way, gun on shoulder, to the level of the moor, then walked across the snow till the immediate surroundings of the ghyll were out of sight. Now, passing a little further up the hill, we turned again so as to reach as nearly as possible the point at which the dog had hidden. At a slight move-

ment among the snow in front, we both dropped behind a boulder. Looking carefully round its corner, I saw the tan come into view, look carefully right and left, and then trot, stopping every ten yards or so, in our direction. The old shepherd forced the gun into my hands, but I returned it—not for the moment thinking that my action forced him to slay his faithful companion and friend of years. The man called to the dog, and it stopped, looking about guiltily for him. The gun-barrel was carefully pushed over the rock, and just as the dog caught sight of him, Jack pulled the trigger. A cloud of snow flew up around us; the faint breeze blew back the evil-smelling powder vapour into our eyes, and for a second or two we could not see the result of the shot. When at last we could, we saw the dog struggling on the white drift a few yards away. The heavy charge of shot had been aimed too low, tearing off one foreleg and smashing the hindleg on the same side to pieces. My companion seemed helpless, so I took the gun out of his hands, and with the other barrel finished the work.

CHAPTER XXVII

WILD-FOWLING ON THE LAKES

At the mention of waterfowl shooting the mind naturally turns to the shallow meres and extensive mud-flats of the Broads, or to the wide, wild expanses of sand, marsh, and salt pasture bordering a tidal estuary. There are, however, some of the great bodies of fresh water worthy a gunner's attention, but these are mainly in private possession. The best wild-duck shooting in the northern hill country should undoubtedly be obtained on Thirlmere, where everything in surroundings and food-supplies favoured by wildfowl is in abundance, whilst a fair bag may be depended upon at the best seasons from the more sequestered portions of Windermere and Ullswater. Wastwater, Ennerdale Lake, Buttermere, and Crummockwater are bold, rock-bounded meres lying right in the heart of the lofty, bleak mountains, and, not presenting any large amount either of cover or food to migratory flocks, are accordingly not

much visited by them. On Bassenthwaite, most northerly of the lake system, cormorants live the year round. At best they are accidental (or winter) visitors to other waters. The heron is a fairly common bird on all our lakes, and heronries of greater or less importance may be found near the shores of Coniston, Esthwaite, and Bassenthwaite in particular.

In deference to the fact of private ownership, anything in the following brief descriptions which would lead to the sure location of the particular water has been omitted.

On a moonlit night, just as the wild-duck season opens, we stand under the trees by a lake-side. Duck signal from the depths of the reed-beds in all directions; the ripe seed-crowns of the sedge bend together and rustle with the passing of the ripples. Out on the open surface small groups of duck are disporting themselves. We have come stealthily to this, for we are a link in a chain of scouts watching for poachers. The alarm has gone through the countryside that the duck are about to be raided, and every keeper is on the alert. After we have lain about an hour—it is close on midnight—listening eagerly to every fresh sound around, guarded steps are heard coming through the narrow, gloomy woodland paths, perhaps the head-keeper patrolling to see

that his subordinates are watching diligently. But no! just as we prepare to rise from our cramped position two men steal by, going straight for the water's edge. Our hiding-place is behind a clump of hazel, through the slim stems of which a good view of the reed-beds in the moonlight beyond the shade of the trees is possible. Near at hand is the lake's pebbly marge. The root of the hazel-clump, indeed, conceals a small cavity delved by a succession of winter floods. The poachers, we are surprised to note, carry no guns or other impedimenta. They walk down to the shore, and, after a close survey of the brakes nearest the tiny bay, decide that at present the coast is clear. One mounts guard while the other walks straight for the hazels which conceal us.

Though our presence is as yet undiscovered, we prepare noiselessly for the hand-to-hand encounter which will probably be the outcome of the next few seconds' movements of the poacher. Stealthily he steps across the narrow belt of shingle, then, as with one hand he clutches the furthermost hazel-sapling, he stoops down and busies himself with something secreted in the small, wave-eroded chamber. It seems that every moment he must discover our presence, our softest-drawn breath seems likely to betray us, while the loud-ticking watch is an ever-present signal to the

poacher's quick ears. Once his foot slips as he tugs at the unseen thing, and the hand thrown out to prevent a fall grasps a limb within three inches of our faces. Yet so dark is it in these woodland shadows that our hopes begin to rise. He may not see us after all, and we shall have a fine exposition of poaching methods, concluding with a successful trapping of men, nets, and game. For a full two minutes the poacher labours within a yard of us, then, lifting a huge mass in his arms, he makes along the shore to the opposite horn of the bay to that on which his accomplice has already stationed himself. Every movement is carried out in absolute silence; the footsteps fall on the shingly beach without the slightest noise. My close acquaintance, now barely visible in the gloom, throws something across the stretch of water. Then I know that the net is being drawn over a bed of reeds where a flock of duck are bivouacking. Now cautiously it is drawn forward in some manner, and there are stifled splashes and outcries. Both poachers lie flat among the rocks waiting for the turmoil to settle a little; then they are up again, and the net is drawn further along. I can now hear it breaking the reeds as it comes, and the lap of wavelets when it touches the water. In a few minutes the whole is drawn ashore, and the men seem to commence despatching the meshed

birds. The darkness beneath the trees makes it impossible to follow their movements with the eye. In the killing process one or two birds escape and wing, blundering out into the open lake, calling and quacking in wild affright. In a few minutes the poachers complete their work, and, bags being also produced from the cache beneath the hazel veil, the dead birds are soon ready for transport. The heavily laden poachers make their way quietly into the depths of the woods, avoiding all moonlit spaces, and hugging the densest patches and shadow as closely as possible. As soon as it could be done without alarming the retiring twain, I ran to the head-keeper and told him what had occurred. Swearing at my not giving a sign earlier and so preventing the depletion of the reed-beds, he struck a match and held it above his head a moment. There was an answering glare, a blue port-fire, from a boat on the lake, the agreed signal to all our scouts that, the poachers having left the lakeside, a search was to be made in the woods. 'Come on,' said the head-keeper, as he turned to follow the poachers. We ran hard through the dark alleys among the trees, making as little sound as possible, and ere long, as we threaded a thick tangle, I espied figures moving a score yards to our left. In response to my nudges the keeper redoubled his speed, and in a

very few seconds we had headed the fugitives off, though they did not know it. Looking for danger behind, the poachers had given no thought to the possibilities of their being outsped. News had been brought to the keeper that a conveyance for taking away the spoils and spoilers was already in a dark, lonely lane by the edge of our covert, and our descent was so timed that the poachers and their accomplice were held up just as the game-bags were being lifted in. The capture was neatly carried out, and is one of our freshest memories of our association with the woods, lakes, and fells.

Space runs on as we warm to our recital, but we must give some slight description of a wild-fowling on another of our lakes. Again the night is brilliantly moonlit, and a million stars scintillate from the cloudless dark-blue vault. The trees are bare of leaves, are hung with white instead of green, and the countryside is under snow. The rigours of winter are upon us. On the bleak moorlands every ghyll is choked with a white drift, every bog is deep frozen, and the fast-spreading sheath of ice has driven the huge flocks of waterfowl down to the lakes. All day we have heard the wild clan calls of migrating geese, and occasionally the swan's shrill whistle. Heron and curlew have been ever present, and a ceaseless babel in duck language

has long risen from the lake. As darkness fell, the flocks, which had shyly remained near the centre of the lake, gradually grew bolder, and are now feeding on the luscious subaqueous plants quite close to the ice-rim of the lake. How the oars, in spite of every endeavour to progress in silence, squeak and creak as they oscillate half round and half round again on their iron pins! Before we had rowed far we discovered that the old boat was leaky. Under ordinary circumstances the slight inflow would not have mattered to us, but to-night there was a possibility of having to crouch in the boat-bottom as we neared the duck flocks, and the sound of a baling-tin would carry as much terror to our game as the report of a gun. Arrived where we calculated the breeze would help us most in our stalk, the clumsy oars were quietly shipped, and the craft, catching the current of a tiny beck, drifted out from the shadows of the trees. In front were two wooded islets with a small gap between, and beyond this the open lake. From our recumbent position on the false floor of the boat, we made close survey of the weeds between which we were floating. A spit of shingles stretched almost across the strait, and for awhile it looked as though we would go aground on it, but the scarce moving current modified our course and we cleared it. A gaunt heron, as we came

along, stalked from behind the island and along the shingle. Then, selecting its beat, the bird waded into the water, and instantly lost all signs of animation. The air was freezing ; in the few tufts of reeds our boat struck there was the slight snapping of thin, new-born ice ; we felt the cramp gripping tentatively at our muscles, and knew that within the next three or four minutes enough water would have leaked into our boat to make our position exceedingly uncomfortable. The heron does not deign to notice the slow passing of our boat or the presence of two frost-capped heads above its topmost plank, and we glide on in the direction of the reed-beds without any alarm being raised.

The surface of the lake glistens bright around us ; from the sycamores round unseen farms owls send across the water their monotonous, dreary lay ; high in the southern sky the moon rides in silvery majesty ; once to our left we see gleaming the rosy lights of the house we left so long ago. We are torn with so strong a desire to exchange our present damp, cramped position for its distant comfort that henceforward our eyes are riveted on the cheerless snowfields rising up across the steely water to our right to meet the mist clouds which hide the mountains from view.

At last the sounds of duck are plainly nearer,

and cramp and damp are forgotten as we prepare to shoot. The boat drifts close to the matted weeds; there are the birds, feeding close to the shore. We have brought two guns apiece, loaded with heavy charges of shot, in the hope of obtaining a decent bag. As we drift near and push our guns forward, the whole flock rise with a loud roaring of pinions. The reports of our first guns crash out almost together. Quick! the second guns—for at the disturbance another great duck-cloud is rising, with a prodigious quacking and splashing, on the wing. In the uncertain moonlight, with a thick black wood beyond the mark, a single barrel apiece is all that we can send among them. Then we pause, in the hope that some band of stragglers may rise within range. In this we are disappointed, and, while the air resounds with bird-alarms, we put out the oars and push into the thick tangle of weed, grass, and reed, seeking the birds we saw fall to our guns. There is a slight sound—a spasmodic clucking—under the prow of the boat, and I lean over to seize a duck not so hard hit that its escape was impossible. From the ice-crowned top of a green accumulation I next gather three—all killed outright. The slightly wounded birds have long since made off; they are calling wildly and splashing in the impenetrable depths of the reed-beds. After a close

search, nine birds in all are picked up, not bad at short range from ordinary guns in novice hands.

At our initial success we were greatly elated, and cold and damp were no longer considered. We longed for further worlds to conquer ; here the ducks were unapproachable, the sky-splitting clamour showed no signs of abatement, while the lake's edge was so fringed with coppice that another good station would be difficult to find. My companion whispered that a flock of wild geese were feeding at mid-afternoon near a particular islet. We could row the boat some distance towards this, then, drifting down, surprise the geese as we had done the ducks. This time, however, we were not so successful in gauging the course of our boat, and we were stranded a hundred yards down the island we had hoped to clear. As quietly as possible we landed, and made our way through the undergrowth. Carefully reconnoitring through the bushes, we saw the small flock sleeping on the moonlit water in fancied security. But one less asleep than the rest must have winded us, for, alarmed by this sentry, the whole flock sprang into the air and winged away with wild cries. Steadying my aim, I fired a parting shot, but, so rapid and unexpected was the rise, I was not surprised that it was a miss.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SKATING ON WINDERMERE

The frost which binds the whole of the northern lake system in bearable ice must be of exceptional severity and long duration. The last time the broad bosoms of Windermere, Ullswater, Coniston, and kindred waters were thoroughly safe to the skater is now seven years ago; the previous occasion to that must be at least twenty-four winters past. In the land of the fells on Christmas Day, 1894, the fields were still green, but on the following day a long frost commenced. So gradual was its gain of power that the only sheet of ice available on New Year's Day was a flooded bog in a deep, shady glen. And even on the soundest stretches of this, whenever two skaters met, the ice swayed and cracked in threatening fashion. A fortnight later came a partial thaw, followed by a series of very heavy snowstorms. On the mountain passes drifts of fabulous depth were reported. The remoter dales were cut off from ordinary

intercourse with the outside world. Now the frost grew more severe. For several days the mercury scarce rose to freezing-point ; night after night the proximity of zero was reached. During this severest period the air was wonderfully calm, and the inhabitants by Windermere side noted the ice spreading outward from both shores. Skaters daily ventured further out, till, by the first week in February, one man at least crossed the lake at its widest point. From the mountains, where the unusual depths of snow gave zest to the climbing, rendering difficult precipices passable for the first time in my experience, I had watched the long surface daily, and now noticed the crowd of skaters disporting themselves on it. My activity had found a new turn ; I would explore Windermere from its hardened surface.

Thus it was that I glided out of Bowness Bay, where the multitude of skaters had cut up the surface till blades hardly bit, and, with shortened stroke, you almost walked along, heading behind rock-fringed Lady Holm for Miller Ground, where the ice was better. The skate-blades cut to the extreme of each stroke. There was none of that crumbling which denotes the presence in the ice of frozen snow, and the sharpest steels were required to enjoy progression to the full. The hour was very early, and few skaters were

yet astir. Consequently, I had to be content to follow in the marks of my predecessors. At Miller Ground landing I asked a man the best route to Ambleside. 'Ye'r on t' rang (wrong) side o' t' lake,' he replied. 'Ye'd better gah (go) back a bit, and then skate across to Belle Grange Nab.' He went on to tell me that a few days previously three young men had skated by him in the dusk, attempting to pass up that side of the great water. Some ten minutes later he heard a wild cry for help, and with ladder and rope he ran out on to the ice. There was a wild ringing of skates, then a voice at his elbow asked for a ladder. The ice had given way, and one of his companions had been immersed. Taking the ladder, the man sped back at his topmost speed. But he arrived too late. His friend had failed to hold on to the ice-edge, and had sunk to rise no more.

As the narrator pursued his story, another man came down to the stage, and he was of opinion that the ice at the centre of the lake was safe enough. Two persons had crossed the previous day.

Thus encouraged, I headed for the open, and not till I was in mid-lake did another possible danger occur to me. Windermere, like most other large bodies of fresh water, draws its main

supplies from springs beneath its bed. These upcoming currents trouble the surface of the water, and hinder freezing to such an extent that, while the ice is a foot thick at all other places, hardly more than a skimming conceals the spring area. I crossed in safety ; the ice was firm as a rock. But some days later a party of my acquaintance came to practise combined figure-skating on a portion of Miller Ground near which I must have passed. During an evolution one skater passed over a spring, the slight covering of which broke. He was rescued with great difficulty, having risen underneath the surrounding ice. Luckily he retained presence of mind, and was able to swim towards the hole.

Near the Lancashire shore, with the more dangerous portion of the skate over, I pulled up to review the scene. To the northward a great sheet of ice stretched to the very foot of the mountains. The gulf of Troutbeck seemed filled with mysterious gloom, while against the cold blue sky shone out the crowning snows of the Kentmere Fells. To the left of Wansfell, Red Screes, Fairfield, and Nab Scar succeeded, and here and there through the snowfields, clinging to their braes, dark patches showed where the predominating white had been unable to cling to the great bare rocks. Loughrigg and Red Bank,

with Steel Fell and Helm Crag, white-robed sentries of another dale, completed the circle of giants. My attention was now drawn to a white line ahead of me, like the breakers of a surf. The skaters' path turned close to the shore, and shortly I approached the line. The white was of an upturned edge of ice. I am no scientist, but it seems that on these large stretches, as ice thickens under the influence of greater frost, it must expand somewhat. The result is that at a weak point (such as a river mouth) a crack occurs ; the broken surfaces are crushed together and upward by further expansions.

The crest of ice easily passed, I sped rapidly along under the lee of the land. Woodcutters were at work near by ; the sounds of axes as they plied their work rang through the stillness, the crash of snapping branches and falling trunks came to my ears at a great distance. Near Wray Castle I dallied, threading through the rocky bays and glancing up snow-covered rides, hoping to see some strange bird visitants. To my eager ears at last there came a chattering sound. Hanging head downwards, or clinging at precarious angles to the tiny branches, a colony of gaily coloured birds had taken possession of a copse. Crossbills from the frozen North had flown to Windermere side to eat the 'seeds' of the abundant fir-cones.

Unguided, these birds had come over miles of dreary moors and over the bleak summits of a score mountain chains, and were now quite at home in new surroundings. They whisked on rapid wing from twig to twig, picking out some fir-cone, and striking it with their powerful crossed beaks. If fairly hit and, though split, it kept its place on the branch, the bird fed on the uncovered seeds. If it fell to the snow beneath, as scores did, the crossbill never deigned to follow, but turned to rifle another fruit of its contents.

At another crack in the ice-surface the ice-sheets, after colliding and throwing up a surf of splinters, had separated, leaving thin ice between. A gentleman, crossing from the opposite direction, told me that the whole expanse in front was perfectly safe. I therefore turned, and swung easily by Seamew Crag, a hardly visible islet of small boulders, to continue my survey of the shore. The duck had been frozen out of their haunt among the reeds long ago, and were now doubtless disporting themselves on the brown sands of the estuaries miles away.

Skimming rapidly along, I passed Fisher Crag, a pile of naked rocks crowned with an irregular dark canopy of Scotch firs, then turned up the twin channel by which Brathay and Rothay enter

the lake's head. I skated as far as the meeting of these waters, and proceeded up each stream as far as possible, to Brathay Bridge's ivied arch and the first single span across the Rothay. As I returned, the old Roman camping-ground was by my side, and in a few minutes I had reached the landing-place of Waterhead. Without landing I skimmed close inshore, passed the steam-yacht, frozen in by its tiny piers, and continued to where a red flag warned that the great bay of Low Wood could not be entered with safety. Accordingly, I turned across the lake. How much the joy of skating is enhanced when the sport can be undertaken on a large ice-area! You glide out into the distance with long, swinging strokes, and feel lost at first in the immensity. The shore becomes a mere silhouette above the livid sheen of ice, a study in black and gray and white. It is delicious to any English skater to plod away for awhile without coming to a turn, and on such a waste of ice as frozen Windermere there is room for all—

'They sweep
On sounding skates a thousand different ways.'

Some skate along the well-scored routes, others strike out into less frequented areas.

I got across to the Wyke shore, and ere long was striking along opposite Miller Ground. Of

islands in the northern basin of the lake there is but the exalted reef of Seamew Crag, but in the portion now approaching were several tree-covered holms. Belle Isle is the largest island on Windermere, and the only one inhabited. The curious canister-shaped building among the trees is upon the side of what was at one time the hold of a Royalist. When King Charles's forces were assaulting Carlisle—a city for many centuries held by the power of the sword alone—the owner of Belle Isle, best remembered in legend as Robin the Devil, was called away to render service to his King. In his absence a Cromwellian (Colonel Briggs) from the adjacent town of Kendal raised a small army and vainly attacked the island fortress. Cannon were unknown on the Border, and the defenders easily repulsed attacks by boat. The strait between Belle Isle and the fir-clung braes of Claife had been frozen across ere the snowstorms came, and was, therefore, not easy to skate through. As I came clear of the narrow, and the long tract of ice below the ferry came into view, I paused a moment. In the few hundred yards to where the boat was plying to prevent its channel being frozen up an ice-yacht was manœuvring, attended by a crowd of skaters. It was rare sport to watch the nearest skater seize hold of the tail-end of the yacht just as the faint breeze filled its sail, and his

companions clutch at his coat-tails as the contrivance gathered way. Then, with perhaps a string of fifty men and boys behind, off like an arrow sped the *White Foam*, all yelling with glee at the wafting rush of air in their faces. I dare say the speed would approximate a mile a minute as the white-sailed craft whizzed past me. How smooth, how steady its motion! I watched entranced. Then the occupant of the yacht let go his sail, and his craft described a semicircle. The men he had been towing, however, could not turn so readily; their line broke and away they scudded till the momentum gave out. The ice-yacht's occupant passed me, an elderly gentleman, of whom such a lark might hardly have been expected; but his voice as he hailed me was that of a rollicking boy, his heart had not aged, and he beat about in his ice-yacht awaiting the return of his scattered followers.

Past the ferry the ice was almost unoccupied, and I had perforce to keep inshore. Coasting is the greatest of all ice pleasures. Moving steadily along parallel with the shore you enter many a tiny cove, the existence of which was hitherto unsuspected. You glide quite close to the eddying column of smoke from the charcoal-burner's oven, or skirt the boundaries of an out-of-the-way farmyard. Vigilance is necessary, too, on such

expeditions; the numerous mouths of becks are always treacherous going. Space will not permit any further description of my solitary skate. At one point, by allowing my attention to be distracted by a huge heron, I found my skates moving through a pool of water. Retreat seemed impossible, so I drove ahead, lucky to escape with only the hearing of a terrific crack. Beneath the shaggy slope of Gummers How I paused awhile, exploring what was to me an almost strange portion of the lake.

Twilight is falling on the long valleys yonder, though the western hills wear still the crimson crown of sunset. The blue ice in front grows duller as rapidly as does the sky above, and a cold night breeze sweeps past. Shortly we pass Storrs and reach the Ferry Nab. It was from the wooded promontory on the further shore that long ago, on a dark, stormy night, the evil voice called 'Boat!' which the poor ferryman obeyed so fatally. No passenger was there, but some sight—no one knew what—sent him back with bloodless face and dumb, to die next day. The owls are calling 'Boat!' there yet, but not the fiend, who has been exorcised, and laid in the wood quarry by the priest of Chapel Isle years and years ago.

My skate back from Waterhead after dark forms a very interesting memory. As I approached

the first crack a few skaters were still near ; a long, gurgling crackle travelled along the ice ; a lady screamed and made for the shore, four score yards away. I called out that we were quite safe, but she did not heed, and rushed towards a dangerous bay, which I had reconnoitred earlier in the day. I spurted in pursuit, and caught up to her ; barely in time, however, for the thinning crust rocked like a raft before I could arrest our impetus and swerve to sounder ice. I did not fear drowning, for the water was shallow, yet an immersion would have been very unpleasant. The crack now loomed in front like a feathery surf. In daylight I had passed it with ease, but at night things look different. Across this, the widest part of the lake, gleamed the many windows of Lowwood Hotel. At various houses by the shore lamps had been hoisted into the trees, and figures were gliding on the lighted area beneath them ; but out with me was utter darkness, loneliness and silence, save for the quiet rasp of my skates. Wray Castle and a few farmhouses threw occasional gleams of light through the black fir-woods and narrow snowfields. Suddenly in front appeared something black—a huge dog squatting on the ice, it seemed to be. But as I neared it the mass seemed to dwindle in size. Was it the head and shoulders of a man clinging for dear life

to a splintered ice-edge? I put on speed; then the bulk seemed again to increase, but not till I was within thirty feet did I recognise the outlines of a man, kneeling and rebuckling his skate-strap. I hailed him with relief; a companion under such circumstances could not be wearisome, and while the ice roared and snapped in peals like thunder (a common night occurrence on large frozen sheets), we made for the second crack near Rawlinson's Nab. To cross this it was necessary to land and walk or slide a couple of yards. My companion shot round with ease, but my skates struck a chunk of ice or stone and came off, throwing me on my head and partially stunning me. Till this I had not noticed anyone standing by the wood-edge. Two farm-servants picked me up, but I was no worse, save for a bruise or two. The ice was bad here; at many places it was broken through, so that for a few score yards we had to follow our leader cautiously. Then we spread out again—the gang was now eight in number—and made for the row of lights at Bowness. It became a mad race in, for we were sure of the surface. In Bowness Bay we found about a hundred persons skating about in the light of a tall electric standard in front of the Old England Hotel. It was grand travelling near Belle Isle, where only a few were now plying the steel; a concertina squeaked as one

party swept by; an ice-yacht whizzed along, its sole occupant clinging precariously to the thin structure. A distant hum of voices crept across the island from the bay we had just left. A few minutes more of easy skating, and, as we landed at the Ferry Hotel, the kennelled hounds gave out a merry chorus, which echoed along the fir-covered bluffs—in happy augury of hunting days yet to come.

CHAPTER XXIX

AT THE DEEPDALE MEET

The fells congregating round the head of Ullswater contain some of the roughest ground in this country. Viewed from the lake, their breasts seem dotted over with sheer rock faces and purplish scree-beds, and scored with deep, narrow ravines. These wild regions afford harbourage to an immense number of foxes, and the pursuit of these among the scaurs and gullies is the favourite winter pursuit of the dalesmen.

The meet was at Deepdale Bridge, some two miles from the lake. A dense mist veiled the crags of Fairfield, while the minor ridges nearer at hand were barely clear of the whirling clouds, and a breeze blew from the north-east. The day was not too favourable, but in the hope of 'chopping' some outlying fox or storming an ill-chosen lair the hunt was started. We first cast around the nearer fields, crossing several faint vestiges of trail showing that a fox had been prowling around

during the night, then walked on to above the farms to draw a bracken bed from which a fox had some days ago been disturbed. A wild yell rose as half the pack dashed into the russet tangle and struck the line together, a frenzied shout from those near enough to be infected by the enthusiasm, a hurrying forward to the spot whence the hounds were already racing, and the 'run' was begun. For five minutes we went at breakneck speed across slippery stones and lichened boulders, across rocky ghylls, through more rotting bracken and stout, retarding heather, descending rather than ascending the hillside. Then the sound in front began to have an upward trend, and we shortly caught a glimpse of hounds entering the mist a mile away. This point we reached after a tremendous climb, at first over slippery grass, succeeded by a path among boulders, finally by hands and knees up an almost perpendicular scree chimney bounded by two pieces of cliff. The horn was winding somewhere above, for the huntsman had hopelessly outstripped us, and now and again came a long-drawn sound—as it seemed, the memory of a foxhound's voice. At first the waning sounds seemed to indicate that the fox was making for the shelter of St. Sunday's Crag to the right, and we struck in that direction as soon as the cliffs were cleared. In a few minutes the

mist closed in below, shutting out the tiny dale, and leaving us in semi-darkness. The sounds of the hunt were long since lost. For a while we plodded on through scree and boulder, then a loud chorus not far in front surprised us. We were not long in finding the hounds now. The huntsman alone of the field was 'up,' and he busily examining a huge moraine in which the hard-pressed fox had taken refuge. We could hear the terriers growling and worrying and snarling below, and every few minutes a sharp shriek proclaimed that one or other of the combatants had found flesh. In a few minutes more figures came through the mist, and a short consultation was held as to the manner in which Reynard's stronghold had best be attacked. A young man volunteered to bring a crowbar which three years before had been *cached* in an earth a mile away, and we accordingly waited. The intense excitement at first prevailing abated as the minutes passed and Reynard did not come into the open. The mystery of how we, though passed by all the others in the toilsome ascent of the slack, yet managed to reach the imprisoned fox within a minute of the huntsman, was explained by the fact that the chase had crossed the hill far above, visited another set of earths, and returned after a wide circle among the rocks. We had simply

plodded along at a level. At one point we must have traversed a narrow ledge above a tremendous abyss, but as the mist revealed only a radius of a few yards at a time, we had not noticed our dangerous position.

At length the crowbar arrived. A burly shepherd forced a big boulder off the summit of Reynard's refuge, and the attendant noise scared the fox from beneath. With the terriers snapping at his flanks, he galloped obliquely down the hill-side in a vain attempt to outspeed the hounds, which, though driven far away to give him a chance, now swept along at a tremendous rate. I have seen men and dogs manipulate scree and boulder in headlong descent at guide-race or hound-trail, but it was reserved to this occasion to prove the fearful speed and dexterity at which, under pressure of excitement, men, hounds, and fox twist and turn, race and leap, over broken ground. The chase was out of sight in a flash, though we did our utmost to keep in view. It was, of course, only a rush of a minute before the fox was run into, but by the time we arrived a few blood splashes and bits of fur among the stones were all that could be seen.

The huntsman was now in favour of returning below the damp mist-folds, but was persuaded to place the hounds across one or two well-known

fox routes. At the first of these the pack certainly found a line, but the ground was so bosky and the weather so unfavourable that the huntsman called them off. At the next a fox must have been disturbed by our approach, for the scent was very strong. The hounds, as usual, bolted out of sight almost instantly, and our only guide was their occasional cries. We again tried ineffectually to keep pace with the field. Though few of them could have left us on the flat, up here, where dun light, rocks, and screes made running almost impossible, the dalesmen simply passed us at their pleasure. The result was that before many minutes we were halting breathless in an ascent, mist boiling above and below, with no sound, however distant, to indicate where the chase lay. Our first idea was to get to the top of the ridge above as rapidly as possible. Up the scree and rubble we painfully worked, for our past exertions were now telling their tale of exhaustion ; but at the crest our position with regard to the hunt was not improved. The question of direction was of paramount importance, but it was difficult to arrive with any certainty at the direction of the likeliest earths. The least dull portion of the sky indicated the south, and our recollection of the change of route in the last run made it likely that we were not far from Wrangdale Head,

between that cliff and Red Screes. If this guess was at all correct, the wire fences dividing two series of 'pasturing heafs' could not be far distant. In a short time we struck a belt of grass, and beyond it the expected fence. Our route was now due north for Fairfield, with at first a slight inclination to the left to avoid some specially craggy places. We were resting a moment on a rock when a shadow showed in the moving mist, and before we could stir a fox leapt along the stones not thirty feet away. The surprise was mutual. The fox, forepaw in air, stood balanced on the pinnacle of rock, its angular mask glaring with fiendish expression at us. For a few seconds the scourge of the fells and we looked at each other, then Reynard, with a sharp snarl, turned and disappeared in the mist-banks.

Over some wide crag-beds, from which a slope shelved at a severe angle, we wandered. Often we imagined that hunting sounds came through the clammy air, but these were not repeated. In about an hour we reached the farther slope of Fairfield, at the foot of which would be Grisdale Tarn, and walked about the two cairns awhile in the hope of some trace of the pack being revealed.

Thus the time passed until three o'clock, when a perceptible change was felt in the air ; the light filtering through the dense clouds gradually died

out, and then through the hushed air came the thin, whitening snow. It was not pleasant to be immured in chilly cloud on this summit, while every minute the gale grew stronger and the snow-wreaths more dense, so, carefully surveying as much of the slope as was possible, we picked the likeliest piece of scree and plunged down the incline. Ten minutes later we were below the mist and approaching the tiny nook of mountain ground bounded by the steep Dollywaggon Pike. From this point to Patterdale we descended the narrow dale in the teeth of a complete storm.

We reached the village half an hour after the start of a small expedition in search of us. Six shepherds were facing that awful whirlwind on our behalf, and it was some hours before they could be recalled. With characteristic sagacity these men had taken different paths up Fairfield, arranging to meet at the summit. They had not provided for our return by the unlikely Grisdale route. Even when the news reached them of our safety, they carried out their plan fully. Five reached the summit cairn within half an hour; the other had to be sought for, and was found, familiar with the ground though he was, to have entered a wrong gully in the pitch darkness. About nine o'clock the incidents of the day closed with the return of the shepherds.

CHAPTER XXX

AN EASTER CUSTOM

Beyond the modernizing sphere of industrial activity, many ancient and picturesque customs are clung to in rural districts, and among these is jollyboying, as it is observed in Westmorland. Under various names and guises, pace-egging—the custom of going to houses and asking for hard-boiled and dyed eggs at Eastertide—has been carried on over many counties from time immemorial; but the acting of the play of 'King George and the Prince of Paradise' is not so generally known.

The writer's acquaintance with the custom is lifelong, for his whole life has been spent in the very locality in which it is observed. One of his earliest recollections is of being allowed to stay up and see a party act. It was a dark and windy night; the fitful gleams of a horn lantern illuminated the faces round the ring for a pulse, then threw into high relief the actors in their paper

gewgaws and uncouth faces; then moved on to delineate the ivy-clad walls of the houses near. The memory is vivid, but an air of unreality seems to pervade it. Being a cottager's son, as the years rolled on he took a place in the cast, and went round acting. And what times and experiences they had! Visiting the outlying farmhouses just ere the farmers retired to rest, charging unceremoniously—maybe a relic of that privileged mummery of ancient days, of which the custom takes the place—into the low-ceiled, whitewashed kitchens, and acting without leave or consent. Occasionally the obtrusion was resented and the party hustled forth; but for years it had been tolerated, and now died hard. Now, however, we hear a knock on the door, and a timid voice asks, 'Please may we act?' The sheep-dogs wherever we went used to harry us—figures with black faces and streamers of coloured paper came not within their philosophy—but the parties were not to be denied. Artists, poets, and great orators have raved over the beauties of the home-like kitchens of ancient Westmorland, and doctors have declaimed against their insanitation. Supper was always ready laid for us; lad-like, we rejoiced at the prospect of five or six suppers in one evening, without reproach from anxious parents, and for this we blessed Easter.

And then the people we met on our rounds—the burly farmers who to-night welcomed us to their firesides, and to-morrow would chase us from their fields for playing football therein. But such prospects were not indulged, and it was ever, 'Noo, me lads, let's hear yeh sing'; and seldom did the old, old jokes and refrains fail to please. At the end of the performance came an ordeal which we lads would gladly have omitted. The farmer's wife must know what we all were.

'Wha's that wi' t' black face?' she would ask.

'Jack Darby.'

'What! He has grown. Sithe here'—to her husband, as she pulled forward the unwilling lad—'Bob, this is Jim Darby's lad—li'le Jim Darby as harvested wi' us five-an'-twenty years sen'. My! but thoo's gaen to mek a strapper.' And so on with the whole party, jokes about our parents' and grandparents' doings (for all our folks had come from the land to the mills) being passed as the examination progressed, and identity became more established.

Thirty years ago the custom was more widely respected than it is to-day, and many men not yet old remember acting in other portions of the county than the Kent Vale, in which it now principally obtains. Here, again, it has lost most of its ancient honour, for few of the lads

have even a good idea of the whole wording of the play. It is a pity that a notion of the degradation of the custom is the immediate cause of this, for with the parents, not with the youngsters, the fault at present lies. The visiting of farm-houses, we are told, savours of begging. The histrionic level of delivery is not high; it seems to me less care is taken in this matter than formerly, but perhaps fond memory has hid the faults of our style.

The dialect in which the play-poem is recited has mutilated the original, so that correct meanings and metres are only arrived at with difficulty. There are some words in the play which are impossible to more than guess at; for instance, the word written here and pronounced 'Jinnus' must have an equivalent in Moorish or Saracenic, but the exact term is unrecognisable.

To what period the play, which is a single scene followed by a chorus, properly belongs cannot be ascertained, but the general character of the whole points for origin to the middle of last century. It may then have been a political satire of some coherence, but it is to be feared that the whole has since been renovated, many new speeches having been introduced within my memory. Even the last-century originality may be doubted, as this was probably based on older doggerel.

The acting is at present carried out by five boys, representing Tospot, the Hunchback; King George, the champion; the Prince of Paradise, whose aspirations to the above title are cut short in the course of the performance; old Mally Masket, a lady given by tradition as old Tospot's wife, and presumably of nondescript character; and Dr. Jackie Brown, a quack of the common or garden type, whose tales of travel incite admiration if not belief, savouring as they do of the days of Drake and the reported wonders of the Spanish Main, as given in some of our oldest travel-books.

The Hunchback comes on to clear the way for the braggings of the champions, and they sound their own trumpets in the most self-satisfied manner. At the end of the 'Black Morocco King's' vaunt will be noticed a very distinctly foreign phrase about the goodness of bravery; attention is called to it, as, although included in the present acting of the piece, it is evidently a substitution for something lost.

Tospot's equipment consists in a false hump, formed by thrusting a bundle of shavings between the shoulders of his great-coat. This is held in place by a string round his waist. Once this fastening gave way unnoticed as a party of mummers entered a farmhouse. The play was

carried through without the discovery of the loss till the chorus, when old Mally, reciting the verse allotted her, beat time on the shoulders of her spouse. When the stick began to be plied, Tospot tried to get out of the way, but his protest was ignored. For many a day the signs of his treatment were black and blue upon him. As the party left the kitchen with their present of eggs, old Mally, who was leading, tripped over something and broke the majority of her eggs. Then Tospot found it convenient to point out that this stumbling-block, the cause of two mishaps, was his 'hump.'

Tospot also carries a stout stick, with which he pounds round vigorously as he makes his call to the champions bold. This stick has a more important use in the eyes of the actors. The Hunchback, according to rule, leads in the approach to any house, and therefore receives the attacks of the dogs who object to darkened visages and uncouth shapes.

King George, as becomes high rank, is decked out with a huge paper helmet (the base of which is a stout brown-paper bag, of the kind used by grocers), from the points of which stream long, thin strips of coloured paper. The front of this masterpiece in millinery is stuck over with ingeniously made paper rosettes, and no small

amount of labour is involved in the construction of this article of attire. A sash, decorated in the same fashion, is worn over a white jacket, and the Champion's face gains ferocity and ugliness by plentiful smudges of soot or burnt cork. Of course, no warrior would be complete without his sword. The King's weapon is of hoop-iron, one end being turned over to make the handle, the other pointed to a dangerous degree, considering the 'wobbliness' of the metal as well as the erratic strokes dealt in the combat. However, no one in our knowledge has yet been hurt by these weapons. The Prince of Paradise's equipment is, with the exceptions that the face and hands are smothered in black, and his sword is an inch or two shorter, identical with that of the King. Dr. Brown's face is disguised, while the 'lady' dresses in the accustomed clothes of that sex, and generally causes amusement by her rig-out.

As stated above, the acting winds up with a chorus, and this portion is more widely known than the main piece. The whole cast form a circle and prance round as they sing, with the exception of during the appeal, when they become 'two or three jolly boys all in a row,' as one version of the verse renders it. Here, even more than in the play, a piecemeal character is evident, for the verses have been altered to suit different genera-

tions since their origin. New subjects have been added and the older lines dropped till it is difficult to speak with certainty on the seven remaining verses, of which, by the way, only one is sung nowadays, a speech having been introduced at the end. This 'homony' runs:

'Ladies and gentlemen, sit by the fire,
Put your hand in your pocket for all you desire,
Put your hand in your pocket and take out your purse,
And give us a trifle; you'll be nothing the worse.'

The periods to which the parts belong are obscure, but it may be conjectured that the introduction of Lord Nelson and his jolly Jack Tar dates from the years following Trafalgar, and the graybeards who knew those days used to say that the original of Nelson sang a song in which Bonaparte and our army were equally derided; but, alas for us! not one phrase of this has been rescued, though it was a national strain. After some years a representative of the army was brought forward, to disappear, leaving a halting verse behind him.

The jolly Jack Tar who came with Lord Nelson was responsible for a hornpipe, or his talents went to a frog-step, a curious and exhausting dance now fast dying out.

'Poor Paddy from Cork' is a more Northern than English verse, and may presumably date

from the days following the great Irish famine, when all the agricultural labourers were forced to seek work and wages in England to enable those dependent on them to keep the old cots standing. It is remarkable that this verse expresses nothing but pity for unfortunate Pat, although composed and kept up by the very class who suffered from his incursion. The vociferations of Old Tospot and Mally Masket are distinctly local productions, and, with great regret, the dialect of these is translated into moderately sensible English.

The effective grouping, the tasteful mingling of many coloured vestments of the actors, which sometimes heralds the first lines of a play, is not considered in jollyboying. The Hunchback seizes his staff, and, pounding the ground with it, dances round till a sufficient circle is cleared for the actors, meanwhile reciting loudly :

> 'Stir up the fire and strike a light,
> And see this noble act to-night.
> If you don't believe a word I say,
> Step in, King George, and clear the way.'

King George steps forward, and begins his boast :

> 'In steps I, King George,
> A noble champion bold,
> With my right hand and glittering sword
> I won three crowns of gold.

'Twas I who fought the fiery dragon,
And brought him down by slaughter ;
And by those means I won the crown—
The crown of Egypt's daughter.'

His rival now gives vent to his prowess :

'In steps I, Prince of Paradise,
Black Morocco King,
My sword and buckle by my side,
And through the woods I ring,
And through the woods I ring.
I'm brave, lads, and that's what makes us good ;
And through thy dearest body, George,
I'll draw thy precious blood.'

The challenge is accepted, and the situation becomes dramatic. King George replies with great ferocity of manner:

'If thou be made of Jinnus race,
I'll make blood sprinkle down thy face ;
If thou be made of noble blood,
I'll make it run like Noah's flood.'

Prince of Paradise :

'Black I am, and black I be,
Lately come from Africa ;
Africa's my dwelling-place,
And now I'll fight thee face to face.'

The dark Prince leads off in the fray, but, after some wild slashing, is run through by the King.

Mally Masket throws herself upon the body, and, in a wild burst of weeping, exclaims:

'Oh, George! oh, George! what hast thou done?
Thou's gone and slain my only son—
My only son, my only heir!
Canst thou not see him bleeding there?'

The King (irritably):

'He challenged me to fight,
And why should I deny?
I'll cut his body in four parts
And make his buttons fly.'

Then, waxing contrite:

'I've heard of doctors far and near,
I've heard of one in Spain.
I'm sure if he were here
He'd bring that dead man
To life again.'

Taking out his purse, he continues:

'I'll give five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five
Pounds for a doctor.
Is there not one to be had?'

Dr. Brown steps forward, and answers:

'Yes,
In steps I, old Jacky Brown,
The best old doctor in this town.'

King George, eyeing him suspiciously:

'How came you to be a doctor?'

Dr. Brown :

'By my travels.'

King George :

'How far did you travel ?'

Dr. Brown :

'From Hip-tip-to, Tallyiantic Ocean,
Ninety degrees below the bottom,
Where I saw
Houses built of rounds of beef,
Slated with pancakes,
Roasted pigs running up and down the street,
With knives and forks sticking in their teeth,
Crying : " Here's a living ! Who'll die !" '

The King seems to have difficulty in swallowing the story, so the learned man continues :

'Last night, yesterday morning,
About three o'clock in the afternoon,
As I was going through St. Paul's Churchyard,
The very dead arose,
Crying : " Doctor, doctor, give me a box
Of your ever-failing pills.
It's a pity that a man like me
Should ever die." '

The King still vouchsafes no remarks, so Dr. Jackie gets at his tales again.

'When I was going through town this morning
I saw a dead dog jump up.

It bit a man's leg,
And made his stocking bleed.'

King George, roused from apathetic indifference :

'Any further ?'

Dr. Brown (briskly) :

'Yes, a little.'

King George :

'How far ?'

Dr. Brown :

'From my grandmother's bed to the stair head,
From the stair head to the chair leg,
From the chair leg to the three-corner cupboard,
Where they kept bread and cheese,
Which makes any man grow fat and lusty.'

King George :

'I'm not talking about fat.'

Dr. Brown :

'Neither am I talking about lean.'

King George :

'What are you talking about ?'

Dr. Brown :

'What I can cure.'

King George:

'What can you cure?'

Dr. Brown:

'Ipsy-pipsy, palsy and the gout,
The plague within and the plague without.
If there's nineteen devils in that man,
I'm sure to drive one-and-twenty out.'

King George:

'Drive them out!'

Dr. Brown:

'Here I lay down my gold watch,
Points to half-past hundred and forty-four.
I have also a little bottle
In my inside, outside,
Right side, left side waistcoat pocket,
Which my grandmother gave me
Three days after she died,
Saying: "Take this.
It'll bring any dead man to life again."'

King George:

'Bring that dead man to life again.'

Dr. Brown bends over the prostrate Prince and gives him a dose from a bottle, saying:

'Here, Jack,
Take a drop of this bottle.
Let it run down thy throttle.
Rise up, bold slash, and fight again.'

Hunchback, stooping down and raising a leg of the dead man :

'As green as grass and as cold as brass,
This man's never stirred a limb yet, doctor.'

Dr. Brown :

'Perhaps my silly old wife's given me the wrong bottle.'

Mally Masket, squaring up to him :

'Thou's a limestone.'

Dr. Brown :

'Then perhaps it's my mistake.'

Produces another bottle :

'Here, Jack, take a drop of this my nip-nap.
Let it run down thy thip-thip ;
Rise up, bold slash, and fight again.'

Prince of Paradise (rising) :

'Oh, my back !'

Dr. Brown :

'What's amiss with thy back ?'

Prince of Paradise :

'My back is bound, my sword is sound ;
I'll have King George another round.'

Swords are drawn and a few passes exchanged ere Dr. Brown interferes:

'Stop, stop those swords without delay,
And fight it out another day.'

Chorus.

'So the first to come in is old Tospot, you see,
A jolly old fellow in every degree;
He wears a top hat and he wears a pig tail,
And all his delight is in drinking mulled ale.
Fol de la, fol de la,
Fol de diddle di dom day.

'In comes I that never came yet,
Great head and little wit.
If my wit be ever so small,
Me and my Pompey 'll wallop you all.

'So the next to come in is old Mally, you see,
She's as jolly old lassie as ever you see;
She's gold and she's silver and copper in store,
And by coming pace-egging she hopes to get more.

'In comes I, old Mally Masket,
Under my arm I carry my basket,
In my basket I carry my eggs,
With my eggs I carry my brass,
And I think myself a jolly old lass.

'So the next to come in is Lord Nelson you see,
With a bunch of blue ribbon right down to his knee;
A star on his breast like silver does shine,
And he hopes you will have a good pace-egging time.

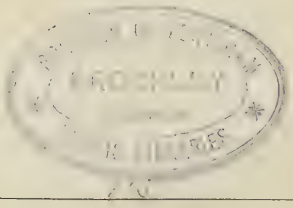
'So the next to come in is a jolly Jack Tar,
Who fought with Lord Nelson during the last war ;
He's fresh from the sea, old England to view,
And he joins in pace-egging with this jolly crew.

'So the next to come in is a soldier, you see,
Who's fought against the Frenchmen in a far country ;
He's a sword by his side wherever he goes
To teach all young lasses so and so.

'So the next to come in is poor Paddy from Cork ;
He hails from ould Ireland ; he comes to seek work ;
He's his scythe on his back, and he comes to work hay,
And then he's off back to ould Erin again.

'Here's two or three jolly boys all in a row,
We've come a pace-egging, as you all well know ;
Spare not eggs and small beer, and you needn't fear
That you'll see us again till this time next year.'

THE END



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